THE PURPLE MASK

LOUISE JORDAN MILN

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THE PURPLE MASK

The Purple Mask

ADAPTED FROM THE PLAY "LE CHEVALIER AU MASQUE," OF MM. PAUL ARMONT AND JEAN MANOUSSI

BY LOUISE JORDAN MILN
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"Mr. Wu," "The Feast of Lanterns," etc.

A. L. BURT COMPANY
Publishers New York

Published by arrangement with Frederick A. Stokes Company

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First published in the United States of America, 1921

"It is wonderful what a few brains and a devil of a lot of cheek will accomplish in this world!"

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CHAPTER I

TRÈS CHIC

THIS is the story of the prettiest game of bluff ever played. It is also the story of a very gallant gentleman, a very lovely maiden, and of a few other folk who are all charming—the bad ones as well as the good ones—because they are all French, and therefore cannot escape their cradle-doom of charm.

All true stories—and this one is perfectly true—are but bits of some longer, endless even, story-chain; bits torn out arbitrarily and recorded more or less deftly. And most of them might as well begin at any one point as at any other.

This one shall begin on a Tuesday evening. It shall begin on the 11th of May in the year 1803. It shall begin in one of the smartest haberdashery and bonnet shops in Paris. Can you suggest a more appropriate place for a French story to begin? Of course you cannot. So—18 Rue de Richelieu, Paris, May 11, 1803—or thereabout—Voilà!

It is a love story of course. Else it would not be much worth writing, and not at all worth reading.

The first bloody throes of the Revolution, necessary and righteous—oh! dear, yes—but ugly, were over—le bon Dieu be thanked—and Paris, staunchly Republican, beautifully democratic, was dressing and preening her pretty feathers, shaking out her chiffons, devoting herself to her toilet again.

Not that Paris had ever been dowdy—le bon Dieu forbid—no, not even in the reddest and roughest of the blood-red days. Louis Philippe Duc d'Orléans—Citoyen Egalité, if you like him better so—when he rode gayly off to his death on the 6th of November, 1793, left his cell in the Conciergerie, to make in the death-cart his last royal progress, sumptuously clad. He went up the scaffold, in la Place de la Concorde, elaborately dressed, and as daintily as elaborately, in a splendid frock-coat of emerald brocade; doeskin breeches; snow-white, jeweled-buttoned waistcoat; exquisite boots, his hair powdered and perfumed as if for a quadrille. He examined the keen edge of the guillotine knife, but ran his flashing fingers along it with a smile of scornful indifference on the proud, patrician mouth that had kissed more pretty women than it had ever said paternosters, but he was openly and deeply anxious about the set of his lace cravat. And the blood-smeared women of the sans-culotte class who cheered and jeered Marie Antoinette on to her death tucked their skirts up

from the gore of the shambles and the garbage of the polluted streets with a careful turn of the wrist, tucked them up to fall in chic folds from chic hips, and admired the taste of their victim's toilet and the fall of her fichu.

And a Republicanism that had really banned feathers and fashions could not have survived a week on French soil. Sumptuary laws had been passed in the first puritanical hysteria of democracy's bloody triumph—drastic ones too—but from the first they had been almost dead letters, honored by the beauty-loving French in the breach, rather than nationally dishonored by a repugnant observance. And now, prosperity once more swelling out the elastic sides of dainty French purses; and Joséphine, the most elegant of all the women who ever have loved clothes and known how to wear them, the first (and adored of all) citizeness of France, the cult of clothes obsessed Paris with a grip stronger than that of the little Corsican.

There were troubles still. The Royalists and the "people" could not, and would not, lie down in peace together. There were factions and dangers. There were troubles full-hatched, and troubles just in the nest. But every one loved pretty things and the spending of money on finery, and aristocrats and plebeians alike found in the indulgence of such tastes a safety-valve and a refreshment.

Majolin was making a fortune, they said. But no one grudged it him. The Government rejoiced to see so good a Republican amass wealth, and the

women of fashion who patronized him regarded his prosperity as a sort of louis d'or cachet set upon their own taste, since it was their extravagance that gave it him—theirs and that of the consensus of choice of some of best-dressed Paris.

The establishment was elegant, but not large. Misjudgment of Majolin might have thought that he preferred and courted obscurity. But that was nonsense. The old man was a keen money-maker; but he was convinced that, in the long run, a richer harvest was to be reaped from a business small enough to be continually supervised in its every detail by himself.

The interior of the shop was attractive and cozy, but quiet: easy-chairs for Madame to loll in while the becomingly coiffured mademoiselles de magasin set the choicest of hats on their own pretty heads at the choicest of angles, for her inspection, flatteringly bright mirrors for Madame to find her own verdict in when the confection was transferred to her own head, stools for her sandaled feet, a tiny, spangled gauze fan to her hand in the hot months, a fire in the grate when Paris grew cold, but nothing to take eye or mind from the gay, delicate wares which were the reason of the shop's being, and the one keen interest of Citizen Majolin's life.

Majolin himself was scarcely attractive, and certainly not cozy, but he was quiet: a still little man, sleek, with a thin, almost sinister face; sad, beautiful eyes that nothing escaped, although they usually gave him the appearance of being many

"miles away." To his customers he was coldly obsequious, to his employees brusque and somewhat overbearing. He was a neat little man, almost poorly dressed—oddly so for so prosperous a tradesman and the sole proprietor of so elegant, though small, a shop—unmistakably a man of the people, in spite of a voice of peculiar culture and hands of peculiar beauty. The voice and the hands were but one more instance of Nature's innumerable, inexplicable accidents—for Majolin's use both of hands and of voice was emphatically peasant; no gentleman ever spoke so raspingly, least of all a French gentleman, and no gentleman ever cringed with his hands as he did, rubbing each in the other greedily, and as if washing them for her inspection, when he bent almost double to ask Madame's pleasure. It was a common, nervous movement, and in its continual fumbling the beauty of the hands was quite hidden; as the beauty of his voice was in the at once servility and incivility of its tone. But the two beauties were there for all the man's unconscious hiding of them. Possibly the tradesman's hands had grown beautiful from the shopkeeper's life—long handling of the lovely and delicate things that he sold—silks, velvets, tissues and tinsels, lace and brocade, gossamer embroideries, feathers plumed in Paradise surely, and flowers that put the blooms of the Tuileries and Versailles to shame. But the beauty of the old tradesman's voice and the high culture that slipped out through its most waspish word are less easy to

account for: Nature had slipped astray there, the jade!

The shelves that on two sides of the room filled it from floor to ceiling were crammed with boxes, paper-wrapped rolls of material, and cases of the finer and more fragile wares that under no circumstances must be crushed or exposed to dust.

It was growing dark—almost closing time—and the place was cozy with the light of two lamps on the counter, and one that stood on the newel-post of the spiral stairs in the corner.

It was almost closing time and the little room was full, crowded even, with four or five belated clients who were trying feverishly to crowd an hour's extravagance into a few moments of time, fingering, deprecating, bargaining and buying. Three shop-girls were serving the customers, good-naturedly, gayly, and Majolin stood majestically at the cashier's desk, missing nothing, least of all missing anything that Laurette did or said, or that was said to her, or looked at her even, for the matter of that. Citizen Majolin was very particular with his demoiselles, and most so with the prettiest of the three—for Laurette was very young, and his niece.

"No, no! I don't care for those," a fine lady who had been fingering for half an hour cried petulantly, pushing the tray of flowers away. "Show me some fichus."

"We have some very pretty fichus," Mademoiselle Constance said, as brightly as if Madame had

bought all the gauze and velvet roses and violets she had scorned, "some in lace, some in Brussels net," and she lifted down from a shelf a large box of the costly, delicate neckerchiefs.

"Henri! Henri!" the customer called. "I want you! Come help me choose! What do you think of these?" Madame intended to do her own choosing, unimpeded by grosser masculine advice, though really Monsieur Henri had a very pretty taste in toilet. His own was lovely! But Henri had been looking at that pretty mouse of a shop-girl long enough, Madame thought. And Majolin thought so too; he had been watching Citizen "Henri" from under beetling brows before Madame had spied her beau's truant interest in the child in the simple gray gown.

The street door opened to a perfect hurricane of silk and perfume, and still another customer frou-froued in, a dame marvelously costumed, splendidly powdered, penciled and rouged, with an unhappy-looking lap-dog dangling uncomfortably in the tight clinch of its mistress's arm. The animal had bitterness on its countenance and cherry-colored bows on its legs. And a cavalier followed the lady.

Majolin rose, and bowed to the newcomer. Madame spent magnificently. "Good evening, Citizeness," he said impressively, "what can we show you to-day?"

"A hat," she cried in much the tone in which an English Richard had asked for a horse once at Bosworth. "A hat! One of your creations.

Something absolutely new! And chic, it must be chic!—très, très chic. Something that will make all Paris stare!"

"Ah!" the shopman ejaculated appreciatively. "Mademoiselle Irene! Attend to Madame!" he called importantly. "Laurette, Laurette!"

"Yes, Uncle?"

"Attend to Madame!"

The old lady, for she was painfully that—painfully, because so grotesquely overdressed and made up—sank heavily into the biggest easy-chair. The little dog yelped miserably, and she smacked and then kissed him, while the two girls hurried to serve her: the pretty girl Majolin had called Irene bringing a very smart hat jauntily set on one hand.

All Majolin's shop-girls were pretty, for pretty girls become all fashions and manner of hats, and plain girls rarely do so. "Here is a hat," Irene said deferentially, "which I can absolutely recommend." The girl's manner was perfect. The dullest comprehension would have realized that half her deference was for the exquisite creation she proffered and half for the exquisite creature to whom she submitted it.

Madame the customer looked at the hat critically, her head on one side. "How should it be worn?" she asked dubiously, but beginning to unfasten the bonnet she was wearing. Laurette hastened with, "Madame permits?" to assist her.

"Ah! Madame," Irene said, "it is most becoming, worn at an angle—so!" And it certainly was

becoming—to Mademoiselle Irene—worn "so."

"Allow me," the girl said ingratiatingly, taking off the "creation," and preparing to adjust it on the customer's wonderful erection of puffs and curls.

"Oh, hold Napoleon some one!" the elderly siren commanded. And Laurette ran eagerly and took the little, beribboned creature. "Oh, thank you! But do be careful with him! He's got a monstrous temper and snaps dreadfully: that's why I call him Napoleon."

But Napoleon the Small neither snapped nor showed temper as Laurette cuddled him in her young arms, but looked up into her girlish face with love-smitten, faithful dog eyes, and a red ribbon of tongue wagging out at her beseechingly.

That hat was on. "It suits you splendidly!" Irene cried, falling back a step or two in sincere admiration.

"No," Madame decided, after a fierce consultation with the mirror. "It is not chic. Take it away."

Three other creations suffered the same rejection. All but one of the other customers had gone now, and all but one girl were free to serve Madame. Another attendant came forward with something as wonderful as a Paris hat shop ever saw, even in those days of towers of beaver and plumes.

"Oh! Mon Dieu! Perfection! Très-très chic," the three girls cried in chorus when the tall master-

piece had been successfully perched on the tall tower of Madame's hair.

"Do you really think so?" she asked anxiously, her eyes on the glass.

"Truly, Madame, truly!" Irene assured her. And Laurette contributed, "The Citizeness Joséphine has just bought one exactly like it."

"Is the wife of the great Bonaparte really one of your customers?" Madame said breathlessly.

Majolin advanced. "She is, indeed, Madame, and not only she. We are honored by the custom of all the Bonaparte family. Leroy and Mlle. Despaus, Lolire and Beuvry make her beautiful robes, but at least half of her hats Notre Dame de Victoires, la belle Joséphine buys here. And here also her sisters-in-law give their patronage."

His client sighed with content and gratified pride. "Well!" she said, smiling at her reflected vision, "it ought to make a stir!"

"It certainly ought, Citizeness—worn by you!" Irene told her.

"Well, I'll take it! Where's Napoleon?" she cried, while her attendant dandy prepared to take charge of the box into which the hat he was paying for gallantly was being consigned. "Ah! there he is then," retaking the reluctant poodle from Laurette. "Was he getting impatient?—the dear little pole-oly!"

"Good evening, Citizeness," Majolin said, bowing gravely at the door Irene held open. "Good evening, Citizen! And a thousand thanks!"

"Good evening, Monsieur Majolin!" his customer said cordially. "It *is* chic, very chic. I am grateful to you for it." She seized her companion's arm and leaned on it languidly. "Escort me to the cabriolet now, that's a dear fellow! Buying hats always exhausts Napoleon monstrously!"

CHAPTER II

GOLD BRAID

THERE was a collision at the shop door. Dominique, the clumsy errand-boy of the establishment, untidy usually, half-witted always, came slouching in as Madame, her gallant, and her poodle went flourishing out. The doorway was fairly wide, but not wide enough for two abreast when the two were as broad as Madame and Dominique—to make no mention of Monsieur L'Ami and Napoleon the Little. Of course it was for Dominique to draw back respectfully until Madame and her cortège had passed on, but Dominique never, by any chance, did the right thing; it was not in him. So he pushed blunderingly on. He too carried a large hat-box, and it and the box in the care of the attendant gentleman beat together like big, paper castanets. Napoleon yelped. Monsieur swore. Madame "Mon Dieued." Poor Dominique giggled vacantly.

But the small incident passed, with nothing more

serious. Every patron of Majolin's knew Dominique well, and took no heed of his constant *faux pas*. The French are finely tender and gracious to all deformed of body or of mind.

Majolin shrugged an impatient shoulder, and moved carelessly away from the group at the counter, but no one else paid any attention.

Dominique slouched up to his master, wiping his face with his cap. "Here is the bonnet from the works, Citizen," he said, holding out the box awkwardly. "And," when Majolin had taken the box, "the letter by the carrier from Calais. At least, I had one somewhere, I think." He fumbled first in one pocket, then in another, and the master waited patiently; Dominique always thought he had lost letters, and usually he had—they all said. But he had not lost this one. He produced it at length, handed it over with a silly grin, and stood vacantly watching Majolin open and read.

Majolin did both indifferently. "Quite right, Dominique," he said not unkindly. "It is all in order. Put the box with the others, over there."

The servant-boy picked up the box again with a sigh of relief, and the master pocketed the letter with a similar sigh. They did not look at each other.

Dominique slouched across with the box to the shelves, looking at no one. He was not an observing boy. But Citizen Majolin was observing—for all those far-away old eyes—and he looked sharply

toward the door as a very splendid sample of his own splendid sex came in clanking gayly.

Captain Lavernais was no stranger at 18 Rue de Richelieu. Many a time and oft he'd been there since Laurette had begun to serve in the shop. Majolin could well have spared this handsome young hussar and his spendthrift custom, for the soldier was débonnaire, attractive, and dangerous too, with his dapper military carriage, his very smart uniform and a sweet, sunny smile, and the old haberdasher took even more care of little Laurette than he did of his louis. But, for some reason, the tradesman never turned the gallant out, but contented himself as best he could by watching as best he could; and that was very well indeed—the watching, not the self-contenting.

"Good evening, Citizen Majolin," Lavernais said cordially. "Your humble servant, ladies," he proclaimed, with a gallant bow that made his sword and his lace and his sash twinkle and creak.

"Good evening, Captain," Majolin replied. "Mademoiselle Constance, kindly see what we can do for Captain Lavernais."

"Many thanks, Citizen Majolin," the hussar said fervently, "but Mademoiselle Constance is busy serving Madame there. I insist upon waiting my turn." Then, aside, "Er—can I not be served by Mademoiselle Laurette?"

"Oh, certainly, certainly," the haberdasher said coldly (and the shop-girls all smiled. Lavernais's secret was no secret)—"Laurette!"

She came forward demurely. "Yes, Uncle?"

"Kindly attend to Captain Lavernais." The uncle's tone was not genial. But the girl's was, and she dimpled.

"With pleasure," she said. "What can I show you, Captain?"

"Do you know," that warrior replied tenderly, "I haven't the slightest idea. Just whatever you like."

The girl's dimples deepened and so did her roses.

"Would you care to buy some ribbon?" Lavernais's handsome mouth twitched. "Or some more gold braid?"

"That's what I want—gold braid!" the officer exclaimed with grateful relief. "Let me look at some, if you please, Mademoiselle!"

"You have not forgotten that you bought seven yards the day before yesterday?" the girl-rogue demanded severely.

"Oh, that's of no consequence," he told her. "Gold braid is always useful in our profession." And as the girl brought the box of braid and lifted its lid, the man leaned across the counter, and added, "Mademoiselle Laurette, I love—gold braid."

"How do you like this kind?" the girl said, holding out a glittering hank. She tried to speak severely, but she failed ignominiously. She scarcely succeeded in being businesslike.

"What do *you* think of it?" the soldier asked with concern.

"I think it is very—dashing," the girl answered gravely.

"It certainly is—magnificently dashing," the man admitted—as gravely. "Let me have—er—three inches."

"Three inches!" Laurette laughed at him openly.

"Yards! Yards!" he corrected.

Laurette nodded demurely. "I will make a parcel of it. Is there anything else you would like?"

"Nothing more that I dare ask for, thank you," Lavernais replied politely. Then he leaned across the counter again, and told her in an undertone, "I really came to say 'Good-by.' "

"Are you leaving Paris?" Laurette asked it clearly, and at her words Majolin came a step nearer.

"I start to-morrow morning," Lavernais said sadly.

"But not to fight?" The alarm in the girl's young voice was sincere. Laurette was in love with some one else, but she liked Captain Lavernais sincerely.

"No chance of it, worse luck," the hussar said regretfully. "Since the absurd Peace of Amiens, all the fighting has been stopped. Nothing is doing now but *Levées* and dances. To flatter the First Consul, we poor soldiers are forced to learn the minuet"—he took a few graceful steps as he spoke —Lavernais had danced in his cradle; and he was

proud of his dancing—"and the *pavane,* so that we may make a show at the Tuileries."

"Take care, Captain," Majolin said, drawing still a step nearer—and Dominique had sidled up smiling, attracted by the few dance steps as some big bumble-fly by tuberoses. "Take care, you are slandering the great General Bonaparte!"

"What does that matter," the Corsican's soldier retorted gayly, "since every one knows that I am ready at any moment to be cut into little pieces for him?"

"Will you be long away, Capitaine?" Laurette asked him.

"Only for a few days, Mademoiselle. I command the escort which accompanies the new Prefect of the Eure as far as Evreux."

"Oh!" Majolin said perfunctorily, "so there's a new Prefect appointed for Evreux?"

"Yes!" Lavernais returned promptly—he was always polite, even solicitously so, to the uncle of Laurette—"A satellite of the First Consul—a fellow named Orsanelli. From what I hear, he's a regular bear of a fellow, one of Bonaparte's Corsican cubs, rough and uncouth. So you can imagine I am not looking forward with any great pleasure to the trip."

"Why is he being sent there?" Majolin said with a flattering show of interest that was palpably more in Captain Lavernais than in the subject.

"Oh," Lavernais gossiped on, "Bonaparte is anxious to restore order in the district of the Eure;

bands of Royalists are terrorizing the whole neighborhood. We reach Evreux to-morrow evening," he concluded, moving reluctantly towards the door.

"Then," Laurette told him, "I wish you a pleasant journey, Captain."

"Many thanks, Mademoiselle. Wish me a soon return to—Paris. Think of me a little, every now and then, won't you?"

"Every time I sell gold braid," the girl said archly.

Lavernais laughed. They all laughed—except Majolin; Majolin was scratching his chin.

"Just so," Lavernais said. "Good night, Citizen Majolin! Good night, ladies!" He saluted and bowed, and the girls bowed and waved him their hands.

Still scratching his chin, Majolin looked at Dominique severely, but did not call him back as he slouched out at Lavernais's heel.

The hussar had forgotten his parcel. He often did that—and to be told of it always mortified him. So Majolin, being thrifty, picked this one up from the counter, and, removing the tissue paper wrappings, put the braid back in its original box. Three yards was quite a saleable length; and gold braid was gold braid—ten francs a yard such gold braid as this. And while Constance was reshelving the box, Majolin opened a ledger and entered thirty francs to the account of M. le Capitaine Lavernais.

Lavernais never forgot to pay or delayed, and

he always paid in person. On the first Monday in June he would call and discharge his debt of May, and at the same time initiate a new debt which he would as certainly pay on the first Monday in July.

CHAPTER III

FOUCHÉ THE FEARED

"NOW, young ladies, tidy up!" Majolin said sharply as the door swung to after the officer and the errand-boy and the last other customer. "It is closing time." And, nothing loath, the three girls pushed about briskly, making all straight for the night.

The haberdasher did not expect to see Dominique for some time. Every one was kind to the lad. And such kindness to the afflicted does the gay, irreligious citizens of the most irresponsible capital in Europe—except Vienna—not so very badly as a sort of religion of itself. But no one was kinder to poor Dominique than the good-natured Captain of Hussars was, and the half-witted boy often followed at the other's heel by the hour. And the spruce officer never cold-shouldered the tatterdemalion, but threw him many a friendly, careless word.

Like so many "deficients," while thick-skinned for the most part, Dominique's nerves seemed rasped by the oddest, inconsequent things. It

always distressed him absurdly when Majolin fell to scratching his chin; and when Majolin did Dominique invariably slunk out unobtrusively.

But to-night Dominique did not follow Lavernais far, but came panting back almost at once.

Majolin looked at him surprised—and almost it seemed not too well pleased to see him back.

"Master, Master!" the youth cried excitedly. "The Prefect of Police!"

"What?" Majolin said crisply.

"The great Fouché himself," Dominique almost blubbered.

"Fouché?" the three girls cried in terror.

"Citizen Fouché?" the haberdasher said coolly. "Coming here?"

"He is outside—with the police officer," the boy spluttered.

And that some one of some assured importance was outside was confirmed at that instant by a peremptory knocking at the door.

"Good Heavens!" Constance bleated, and Irene, speaking at the same time, moaned, "The Prefect of Police!"

Laurette was a little paler, but she stood very still, a curl of pride on her mouth; and her eyes clear and fearless.

"Compose yourselves, young ladies," Majolin said scornfully, and there was no lack of composure in his own cold voice. "We have nothing to fear. I sell neither English wares nor smuggled goods. Dominique, admit the Prefect of Police."

Dominique slouched obediently to the door and drew back its bolt.

Two men pushed in: one short and foxy-faced, with sly, furtive eyes and cheap cynicism stamped all over him and on his every motion; the other tall, morose, sallow, sinister-faced, with piercing hard eyes under bushy, unkempt brows, and a neck like a camel's—an aggressive, smileless man, with aggressive side whiskers covering the sides of his lank face well down to the coarse jaw. The chin and upper lip were recently shaved, but they were pronouncedly blue from their heavy undergrowth of coarse black hair. Human hair could not be blacker, not even Laurette's clouds of lovely, rippling raven.

This second man wore a long coat, short top-boots, a scarf high round the chin, and a broad-brimmed hat which he seemed reluctant to remove. And he seemed reluctant also to remove himself from the door, but stood there in the semi-shadow surlily.

The shorter man came on into the room briskly, saying, "Good day, Citizen Majolin."

"Good day, Citizen Prefect," the haberdasher responded, bowing low. "To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?"

"I want a little information," Fouché told him. "I believe you have a room which you let by the week."

"Quite so," Majolin admitted. "I hold a permit to do so."

"So I understand. Have you a lodger at present?"

"Yes," the shopkeeper replied. "A woman. Citizeness Valentine Boudet, widow of Gobert Boudet."

"I should like a word with her," the Prefect said shortly.

"Certainly!" Majolin acquiesced smoothly. "Laurette!"

"I will call her, Uncle," the girl said, anticipating his request.

"Is that your niece?" Fouché demanded as Laurette went up the short spiral stairs and passed through the arch at their head.

"Yes, Citizen Prefect."

"And these young ladies?" The Prefect pointed to the shivering two who stood clinging together and gazing awestruck at the great Terrorist.

"My shop-girls," Majolin told him, "Irene and Constance Roudil."

Dominique was leaning on the counter, grinning stupidly. Fouché pointed at him fiercely, and Dominique laughed as if flattered. "Has that young giant been in your service long?"

"Two years," Majolin said.

"Come here, fellow," Fouché commanded, and Dominique lumbered over to him awkwardly. "What do you call yourself?"

"Dominique Chaillaux," the lout said with a silly laugh. Whoever else might be afraid of Fouché, he was not.

"Before you came here, what did you do?" the inquisitor continued.

"Worked in the fields," Dominique spoke between peals of laughter.

"He has a fair-sized pair of hands," the Prefect observed to Majolin.

Dominique rocked with laughter. "No fine lady's hands, I warrant," he spluttered.

At that moment a woman appeared at the head of the staircase and descended, followed by Laurette.

"This is my lodger," Majolin said.

"Does the Citizen Prefect wish to speak to me?" the woman asked Fouché calmly before he could question her.

"Your name is Valentine Boudet?"

"That is my name."

"And you come from——?"

"Rouen. I reached Paris three days ago." The woman's tone was neither respectful nor disrespectful. And she was in no way disturbed. The silent man in the background watched her curiously. Constance and Irene watched her too, taking their fear-fascinated eyes from Fouché long enough to measure her gown and its cost, and to wonder how anything so dull and severe could look so admirable: an austere gray gown on an austere woman. But undeniably Madame Boudet was handsome—if one cared for statues and hauteur. And her hair was splendid, with fillets of gauze bound about it *à la Grecque.*

"Rouen!" Fouché said. "H'm!" He threw a glance to the man at the door. The man nodded glumly. "You have a passport?" the Prefect continued.

Madame Boudet smiled very slightly, and drew a paper from the pouch that dangled at her belt. She had expected the question. "Here it is," she said, handing Fouché the paper.

"Brisquet!" he called, and when the dark man came to his side, Fouché handed that subordinate the document.

Irene and Constance clung to each other still more closely, and whispered to each other excitedly —"Brisquet!—It is the terrible Brisquet!"

"Have you lived long in Rouen, Citizeness?" Fouché asked the woman.

"All my life," she told him.

"Why have you come to Paris?" he demanded. "To see my lawyer," she said, "about the rents of some property I own here."

Dominique giggled, as if highly pleased at that.

"The Citizeness is my cousin," Majolin interposed. "I can answer for her as for myself."

Brisquet folded the parchment up again. "Well?" Fouché said.

"It is all in order, Citizen Prefect," Brisquet admitted in his hard, snappy voice, handing back the passport.

"Of course it is!" Madame Boudet said scornfully. "Why are you so curious about a woman

who knows nothing about politics? I have only come to Paris on business."

"Don't be alarmed, Citizeness." Fouché spoke more pleasantly than he yet had. The woman was undeniably handsome. And, too, it pleased him so much to inspire fear that sometimes it moved him to soothe it. And also, it was the life-long policy of the greatest turncoat in all history to make a friend when he could. "We have absolutely nothing against you—and, moreover, Citizen Majolin is well known as a good Republican. I am here simply in the interests of the Public Safety. It is necessary that I should know the social position of every stranger who enters Paris just now—and as it was reported to me that you came from Rouen I wished to see for myself."

"Why because from Rouen?" Majolin asked. It was admirably done; just enough curiosity in his voice, and not an iota too much.

"Because," Fouché announced importantly, "we have reason to believe that the Chevalier of the Purple Mask was lately in Rouen, and is expected in Paris."

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN SHE LOVED

"OH!"

They said it in concert; Majolin with blended incredulity and indifference, the sisters Roudil shrill with excitement, Dominique highly amused. Laurette breathed it softly—almost a prayer.

And Madame Boudet said, carelessly curious, "The Chevalier of the Purple Mask? And pray who is he? It sounds some strolling player fellow. Who is it?"

"Why, Madame," Laurette said breathlessly, plainly shocked at an ignorance that to her was little, if anything, short of sacrilege, "don't you know? His exploits have made his name ring through all France."

Fouché grinned—not unkindly. The man had his human side. "I see our little friend knows all about him," he said. "Do you mean to say that you have never heard of him?"

"Never," Valentine Boudet replied, shaking her head.

"Fancy that"—the Prefect said, puzzled and distrustful—"and you come from Rouen,—eh, Brisquet?"

Brisquet smiled grimly. If Fouché doubted Madame Boudet's statement, Brisquet unreservedly misbelieved her. Valentine Boudet had blundered,

unless she was as innocent and as unconcerned as she seemed.

Fouché turned to Laurette. "Well, my dear young lady, if you will offer me a seat, we shall be glad to hear what *you* know of him."

"Oh, a thousand pardons, Citizen Prefect," the haberdasher cried, seizing a chair. Fouché nodded and took it good-naturedly enough. He liked the little girl with the Irish blue eyes under the soft clouds of black hair, and the cute little *bonnet* of muslin and lace, frilled round with embroidered gauze, and framing her exquisite face exquisitely.

"I——" the girl stammered blushing, but dimpling too—"I—oh, I know nothing—save what is common rumor."

"My niece is too young," Majolin broke in. "I do not allow her to go out much. The fact is, cousin," he turned to Madame Boudet, "the Chevalier of the Purple Mask is one of the most dangerous of the Royalist conspirators." The woman from Rouen raised disapproving eyebrows. "His specialty is kidnapping. He abducts people on the high roads, even in their own houses. No obstacle is too great for him. He has even dared to carry out his operations in the heart of Paris. He is everywhere—to-day in one place, to-morrow in another—spreading fear and terror wherever he goes."

"The most extraordinary exploits are attributed to him." Laurette spoke with high, girlish en-

thusiasm. "At a ball, in the midst of a hundred guests, he kidnapped the great banker Arnaud in his own house at Vallombreaux."

"Quite true," the Prefect corroborated, and not unadmiringly. "It cost Arnaud twelve thousand livres to escape from his clutches—eh, Brisquet?"

Brisquet nodded morosely.

"What!"—Madame was clearly disappointed, and not a little disgusted—"he does all this merely for money? Not a chevalier at all! Merely commonly sordid!"

"Yes, but"—Fouché demurred—"he takes the money from Republicans always, and always to aid the Royalist cause."

"At Lisieux," Irene joined in timidly—the fascination of the subject was irresistible—"they say he took the Colonel of the 17th Dragoons from the very middle of his regiment."

Valentine Boudet exclaimed with surprise, and Laurette with admiration. Majolin nodded resentfully. And poor Dominique rubbed against the counter with booby delight.

"Quite true, young lady," Fouché said with a philosophical sigh; "a regular dare-devil—this Chevalier of the Mask."

"And what does he do with his victims when he has kidnapped them?" Madame demanded, seating herself—frankly interested now.

"He never harms them," Laurette answered before any one else could, "but he only releases them on payment of large ransoms——"

"And he has a special penchant for Government officials," Fouché said dryly; "devil take him!"

"Is he young?" Valentine said idly.

Fouché smiled. Dominique giggled.

"No one knows," Irene said sadly.

And Constance added, "No one has ever seen him."

"But impossible!" Valentine Boudet said.

"It is true," Laurette said proudly. "He carries out his adventures at night—and he always wears an immense cloak and a long purple mask. And his motto, that he always leaves behind—it is so bold —'I take what I will!' "

"Oh, how brave!" Irene cried.

And Constance exclaimed, "I'm sure he is young!"

"And handsome," her sister insisted.

"Ah! there you have it!" Fouché growled, half angry, half amused; "eh, Brisquet? That's our chief trouble—the ladies love him. How are we to catch the scamp, when the women jostle each other to help him and to hide him? Tell me you that! Why, only yesterday at déjeuner the Citizeness Joséphine spoke of him lingeringly as 'misguided but brave—oh! brave.' The ladies make a hero of him—and it's spreading to the people. A pack of women quick to be gulled; a populace is always that. This mountebank hero, this theatrical sir—with his violet cloak and his masque of Imperial purple, and his boasting, 'I take what I will,' he is

becoming a serious menace to the Republican Government."

"A menace that we will soon stamp out, Citizen Prefect!" a bitter voice boomed out harshly from the door side. It was the first time Brisquet had spoken voluntarily. He was wordless as well as smileless, this sleuth of the French Police. And as he rasped out his threat the three girls started; Laurette a little alarmed, the two sisters horribly frightened. Madame Boudet looked at him oddly, questioningly. She was measuring the man, and her eyes were not over-friendly. Majolin too regarded him consideringly. And Dominique shot him a sharp glance, and forgot to laugh.

But Fouché laughed. "But no," he said, "do not be alarmed, ladies. The good Brisquet, he feels on this point strongly, feels acutely. He has a peculiar interest in the welfare of the Chevalier—for the capture of this masked darling of the ladies has just been entrusted to his special care."

The three girls looked at Citizen Brisquet with open enmity. But the others seemed just a little weary of the subject of the masker. Madame drew a bit of work from her beaded reticule and fell to fine stitching. Dominique was falling asleep against the counter. And Majolin suppressed a yawn. But, to cover it, he said with elaborate politeness, "Then the doom of the Chevalier is sealed at last. We all know the reputation of Citizen Brisquet—and how completely merited; the cleverest agent of 'Fouché's Police,' the sentinel of our law, the

most acute, the implacable incorruptible foe of the law-breaker, the terror of all enemies of our Republic." The old shopkeeper made Brisquet a profound bow. In return, Brisquet nodded grudgingly.

"Well, well," the Prefect chuckled, "it is a great opportunity for our so clever friend to enhance that so great reputation. And for that, at least, he is indebted to this hero of purple and bluff."

"But have you news then of the Chevalier's movements?" Majolin asked it perfunctorily. He was all attention naturally to anything the great Prefect condescended to say, but he most evidently —not being a young lady—was not interested in the Purple Mask or its wearer.

Fouché was pleased to chat on. He was fond of his own conversation—a weakness that has undone many abler men; and Joseph Fouché was able. "Last week," he announced, "we arrested a Royalist conspirator who, after some"—he glanced at little Laurette and softened his words—"er—well—some little persuasion—revealed to us his latest audacious project!"

"Mon Dieu!" Madame Boudet just whispered it. She had pricked her finger—rather badly.

"What project?" Majolin asked politely.

"Nothing less," the Prefect said importantly, "than the rescue of the Duc de Chateaubriant!"

"The rescue of the Duc de Chateaubriant"—Laurette began, but broke off with a tiny moan. Perhaps Dominique had hurt her, for the clumsy

lout, fast asleep now, had let his heavy head knock against her arm, as he moved in his uncouth lounging upon the counter, on which she had leaned as she spoke.

Majolin paid no attention to his niece, or to his servant. "The rescue of the Duc de Chateaubriant?" he said reflectively. "How?"

"We know nothing more." Fouché rose with a shrug that hinted of defeat. "We were hot on the trail that time—and then, as a dozen times before, we were balked. On going to re-examine the prisoner, we found him strangled in his cell."

Laurette crossed herself with a sound of pity. She was country-bred (even while partly bred in Paris). But the sisters took a cordial step nearer Fouché. They were Paris-born. Parisienne women —young and old—dote on the gruesome.

"But how could such a feat be carried out, Gaston?" Majolin said regretfully.

Fouché shrugged apologetically. "Oh, the Chevalier is quite capable of it. All Paris knows that on May 15th the old Duc de Chateaubriant—the head and the heart of the Royalist adherents and plotters—is to be brought from his prison in Rouen, and is to be tried publicly here in Paris. This trial, and the subsequent punishment of the Duc—for he is to be found guilty, it goes without saying—will be the death of the Royalist cause."

Majolin nodded his cordial approval, and Valentine Boudet looked up from her needle to smile her applause. But Laurette's red Republican roses

had died into white Bourbon lilies. But no one noticed the girl, except Dominique; the others were engrossed with the Prefect. She clung to the counter with one cold little hand, and Dominique laid his fingers on hers with a lingering touch; a gross liberty for her uncle's servant to venture—but this was Democracy's day.

"Doubtless," Fouché continued, "realizing that the rescue and escape of the Duc would have just the opposite effect, the Chevalier has conceived the idea of carrying out this daring coup. Oh, it is worthy of him. Give the devil his due; he is a great man—essentially great—and with big ideas." Fouché was an excellent judge of men. Through all his discreditable, checkered career this was one of his greatest assets.

Laurette lifted her head and threw Citizen Fouché a proud smile, and her roses crept back just a little. Dominique saw; and he understood. And he withdrew his fingers from hers—gently, with a queer little sigh.

"This time his idea may be too big for him to carry," Brisquet growled.

"H'm! Let us hope so, Brisquet," the Prefect said—but not with conviction. "I trust that before the fifteenth of the month you will have the clever scoundrel safely by his heels."

Laurette's blue eyes flashed.

"But to-day is," Majolin demurred in a troubled tone, "let me see—the 11th of May surely. Yes. You have not much time to catch him."

"Four days—ample time for the indefatigable Brisquet," Fouché retorted.

"Oh, I hope they won't catch him," Irene cried impulsively.

"And I!" her sister echoed devoutly.

Brisquet stared at them evilly, but Fouché laughed slily. "Ah, these girls!" he said, "these girls! But what if he turns out all wrong when we've caught him?" he quizzed.

"How wrong?" Irene asked him.

"Old!"

"Not he!" said the girl.

"Wrinkled!"

"Never!" she laughed staunchly.

"Hideous!"

"Impossible!"

"With a hump on his back, one eye missing, a club foot, and—worst of all—a bristly gray beard!"

"Impossible!" the sisters said in a breath.

"Well, well, he laughs best who laughs last—and you will see when we've got him. Come, Brisquet. I know how you always hate leaving the ladies: it's his one terrible weakness," he told Valentine, with a mock gesture of despair. "Come on, Don Juan. We must be moving on. I have other visits on my list. I am obliged to you, Citizeness Boudet. Citizen Majolin and Citizens all—good night." And the feared and dreaded Fouché went out, laughing genially, Brisquet, snarling and glum, at his heel. And Laurette looked

after them with hate in her eyes, and her pretty lips clenched together angrily.

"Come, Dominique," Majolin said sharply, "it is time to shut the shop. Put up the shutters! Good night, young ladies. Be in good time to-morrow morning."

"I shall be vastly frightened going home to-night," Irene said as she fastened her cloak.

"Frightened, of what?" Constance asked her.

"Suppose we should meet the Chevalier!"

"Good night! Good night!" Majolin said impatiently. And the sisters dropped him their curtseys, and went away, chatting and laughing.

Dominique lumbered in as they went, and closed the door when they had gone through it.

"Is the door bolted?" Majolin demanded.

"Yes," Dominique told him.

A breath — impalpable, significant — swept through the room: a restraint vanished.

Valentine Boudet threw down her needlework, and rose with a sigh of relief, saying, "Well, Marquis, and what is your opinion of what we have just been told?"

CHAPTER V

TRANSFORMATION

IT seemed another room. They seemed other folk. The atmosphere of the house seemed changed, and the manner of all there had changed instantly.

This was high life; the common little shop a salon in some château—these were aristocrats, elegant, polished, the flower of the most perfected civilization since Greece made manners a cult and a poetry—aristocrats masquerading as "people."

Or were they shop-creatures indeed, masquerading now as gentles? In either case it was very fine acting. The French stage could show nothing more finished.

Be the comedy which it might, the two actresses had had comparatively little to do. Their gowns were simple enough for even the humblest, and yet elegant in their simplicity and elegantly worn. But Marie Antoinette had dressed as simply sometimes, and every French woman has a *flair* for elegance. Many a grisette wears the grace and the quiet dignity of a duchess. And a French woman of every class and of whatever age—old or young—is charming and easy. But the haberdasher and the boy were magnificent!—magnificent artists. And pride of place must be yielded to the younger.

The house of Molière had never accomplished anything finer than his "gentleman," *if* he *was* Dominique the half-witted shop drudge, or anything more artistic than his "Dominique" *if* he *was* the gentleman he now looked. He stood spruce, erect, graceful, alert, courteous, attentive to his companions—but their equal. He looked slimmer, standing so. His face was fine-cut, sensitive, haughty—and the reverse of vacant. Even his nondescript clothes had taken to themselves an air—an air of distinction, and set on the upright young figure as if they had been velvet, silk-lined and ruffled with Mechlin.

A patrician sufficiently gifted and practiced can counterfeit a plebeian. A plebeian cannot counterfeit a patrician, no matter what his talents or his persistent industry. These were of the *haute noblesse* of old France: friends and conspirators banded together under their leader the Marquis de Clamorgan, and vowed to the restoration of the Bourbon.

Monsieur de Clamorgan had seen the Revolution coming long before duller eyes could. He had knelt at the King's feet and had warned him, but Louis had laughed and gone on playing backgammon—and playing at life. With a devotion little less than sublime, de Clamorgan had avoided the guillotine and yet forborne to leave France: for he was French, with all a Frenchman's predilection for drama and tableaux and climax. He might have gone to England long before the storm burst,

carrying vast wealth with him, and have been living now in state and in luxury in Piccadilly, or in Twickenham. Or he might have died scornfully and splendidly, as so many of his class had. But he elected to do neither, but to do this far harder thing of living on in democratized Paris, masquerading as a petty tradesman, hobnobbing with peasants and regicides, and proving himself twenty times a day one of them—and watching, listening, scheming, waiting always.

He had played his drab part grimly but exquisitely for ten years now, and he had yet to make his first mistake: miss a cue or speak a wrong one, be too tame or split the ears of the groundlings, fail of nicest accent or of best good discretion. Not a move had the Royalists made since 1793 that "Majolin" had not helped or directed. And not once had he been suspected. Of course, circumstances had aided him. His early years had all been spent abroad or in his own far-away château, burnt to the ground in the Red Terror; not even a charred heap left to show where the porter's lodge had stood; the coat-of-arms carved above the porte-cochère had been hurled down by a she-fury, and had battered out the brains of—his mother! He had seen it done, and the sight had changed his very countenance. But his face never had been known in Paris. He had come here as a Republican, and had stayed and prospered, saluting the tricolor he cursed, conciliating the men he damned at his prayers. "As we forgive!" Jean Paul

Philippe de Clamorgan did not forgive. He waited. The old Legitimists were infuriated by their own sufferings and the torture of their kindred. They were sustained by their own staunch, sincere loyalty, pricked on to tireless effort by a hope that would not die and that for nearly a century was not ill-founded, of seeing the old order restored, their annointed Kings re-enthroned.

De Clamorgan loathed every theory and impulse which had led to the present Republicanism. He was devoted to his Mother Church; he abhorred the harsh, blatant atheism of the ascendant people. His hatred of the usurpers, the regicidal unwashed populace, was implacable. His faith in his own caste, and in its absolute right, was unalterable and entire. A thousand things, some small, some terribly big, had united to make him and his class inveterate in their hatred, tireless in their sacrifice, their endeavor and their loyalty!

He had seen his own brother, whom he tenderly loved, as Frenchmen do, thrown into prison and torture—and to death—and, as far as any watching eye could see, he hadn't turned a hair. He waited.

The Revolution in which she had almost been born had robbed Laurette de Chateaubriant of her mother—his sister. For she was not quite four when the memorable 5th of May, 1789, virtually ended the old Monarchy of France, and gave lusty Revolution its birthday. And the convent schools had been sacked and dismantled. He had sought the babe at the risk of his life—his one soft diverg-

ence from the path he himself had rough-hewn and vowed to his King's service—had found her, and brought her in his own arms to Paris. Here in this shop, and in the tiny, unpretentious villa his bonnet-prosperity had warranted at Saint Cloud, he had reared and educated her as delicately, as carefully, and as thoroughly as the Ladies of the Sacred Heart would have done, if their educational vocation had been spared them—and as they for centuries had educated and molded the girls of her race. A nun who was also a princess had lived in the little villa, and sometimes in the cellar here under the shop, for five years, devoting herself to Laurette, and served for her glad pains by de Clamorgan himself almost on his knees. She had died at Saint Cloud two years ago, and been buried at night by the Abbé Brochard and Bastien in the garden.

Laurette loved her uncle. He was tender to her. For she was very like her mother; and her own father had been seized and incarcerated in the year VII, and before then for some time had been in hiding.

"Well, Marquis, what is your opinion of what we have just been told?" Madame "Boudet" had demanded earnestly.

"My opinion, dear Comtesse," he told her, "is that I would have willingly paid a large sum of money for the information of which that pompous upstart Fouché has just made us a present."

"The Abbé must be warned at once," the woman urged.

"Of course," de Clamorgan concurred. "Monsieur de Morlève, be good enough to give the signal." The Baron de Morlève stamped thrice on the floor near the stairs, and almost at once some one below returned the signal.

"Is the Abbé below—in the cellar?" Madame asked.

"Yes," her host said, "he has been hard at work all day, drawing up the proclamation for the people of Vendée and Brittany."

"Should we not go to him?"

"No," de Clamorgan replied. "We are safe here. And the change will be an advantage—for him." The top of one counter swung up slowly, and its end swung back to the wall, and an old priest, white-haired, serene-faced, came up through the floor of the space behind.

"Well! What news?" The voice and the eager eye were voice and eye of a politician, a statesman, a partisan: the King's man. But the hand was the hand of a priest, fatherly, and he held it up towards the bending Comtesse in benediction.

"Very grave," the Marquis told him. "The police have traced the Purple Mask to Rouen."

"They know that he proposes to rescue the Duc on the fifteenth," Madame added.

"The traitor did speak then!" the priest said.

"Yes," de Clamorgan admitted, "but Choppard

was his warder. He was found strangled in his cell, just in time."

"Then you think he did not betray *us?*" the Abbé said with a cold smile. There was nothing of self in his anxiety. These five people were all and each "dedicated."

"I am sure of it," the Marquis asserted, and de Morlève nodded in agreement—"from Fouché's manner; he spoke quite openly of the whole affair. Fouché trusts me." De Clamorgan smiled grimly.

"Brisquet trusts no one: he's wiser than Fouché there," her uncle returned.

But the Abbé was not satisfied yet. "He showed no suspicion of you?" he insisted. "No desire to search the premises?"

"Not the slightest. You need be under no apprehension, Abbé. Neither Fouché nor his agent has the slightest suspicion that this innocent-looking haberdasher's shop is the headquarters of the most formidable Royalist conspiracy in France—or that the honest citizen Majolin is the Marquis de Clamorgan, head of the Royalist party."

"Good!" said the Abbé.

"Wait!—unfortunately you have not heard all," de Clamorgan continued. "An adversary much more dangerous than Fouché has entered the ring: his chief agent, Brisquet."

"Brisquet!" the priest said sourly. The news most certainly was not pleasant.

"And the task of capturing the Chevalier before the fifteenth of this month has been entrusted to

his special care," the Marquis added regretfully.

"Well," the priest said more cheerfully, "judging by our own lack of information, he will find that difficult. The Chevalier seems to have disappeared utterly. Would it not be better for us to scatter, and wait until we hear from him?"

"And give up the rescue of the Duc!" de Clamorgan exclaimed. "Never! For, if that fails, our Cause is lost!"

"And the downfall of this Corsican Bonaparte—this upstart of the people, who will dare to place himself on the sacred throne of France!" the Comtesse said, rising angrily. Her great dark eyes were flashing with cold, controlled fury—the still, relentless anger of a great lady.

Laurette said nothing. Her eyes were brimmed with tears. They thought only of the Cause. She thought too of her father.

"Rather than that," de Clamorgan told Madame, "I will act myself."

"How?" de Morlève asked quickly.

"That note you brought me," the leader said, "from the carrier, was the message from England I have been waiting for——"

"From England, uncle?"

And they all gathered closer about him now, tense with interest.

"I sent a fortnight ago a secret message to Cadonal, our agent in London,"—they all knew the name and its office, except Laurette. Until to-night her uncle had spared her strain when he

could—"pointing out to him that this was seriously endangering the great project on which all our hopes are based—and at the same time making a proposal to Cadonal to take certain action for the safety of all concerned."

"Without the sanction of the Chevalier?" exclaimed the Abbé.

"With or without," the Marquis said tersely.

"It is a great responsibility," the Churchman demurred.

"I take the risk of that," de Clamorgan said firmly. "I am your leader. Cadonal, in his reply, appears to agree to my proposal. Let me see"—pulling out the letter "Dominique" had brought him—"if I can translate the cypher to you." He studied the page he held, and the others waited intensely. Presently he began to read slowly, picking his hesitant way through the cypher. "I am sending—you just the—man to suit—your purposes. A—penniless ne'er-do-well—who will—h'm—who will—yes, that's it—undertake—any—wild—adventure. He was—formerly Armand—Comte de—Trevières. When—he lost—his title and—estates—in the—Revolution—he came—to England—where he—has since—led—a dissipated and reckless—life. This—however—I—I—take—to be—an advantage—for—your purpose—and he—is—devoted—to the Royalist Cause. He will present himself—in the name of—Citizen Poiret. He will say, 'Have you—any white—flags?'—and—and so on," he concluded, refolding the letter, and repocket-

ing it. "Should this man accept the *rôle* which I intend to offer him, we shall be able to act more freely than we ever have done."

"And when should he arrive?" the Comtesse asked. She had almost boundless faith in de Clamorgan's sagacity—and she was fearless, more fearless than any man.

The Abbé and de Morlève were troubled. They too were fearless—that was the easy gift of their race and their caste. But they relied less unreservedly on de Clamorgan's judgment. He was too bitter to be always wise, the Abbé thought, and de Morlève sometimes wondered if the leader might not with advantage have been half a score of years younger.

De Clamorgan answered the Comtesse.

"He comes this evening. He is in Paris now and should call almost as soon as the shop is closed. He should be here now."

"I don't understand what it is you intend to do," the Abbé said a little insistently.

"You will see when he arrives," the Marquis said smoothly. "Ah! that should be my man!" for there was knocking at the street door.

De Morlève went to the door, "Dominique" again on the instant, in manner and look. He opened it very slightly, and a voice from the sidewalk said, "Does Citizen Majolin live here?"

There are voices and voices. This voice was endowment and prestige—a beautiful voice, clear, deep, incisive, soft and musical. A voice not to be

denied, courteous, confident. Long, long centuries had bred that voice. The speaker may have lived a roughening, penniless, ne'er-do-well life in London town, but nothing had coarsened his voice or blurred its exquisite timbre.

Laurette looked up towards it thirstily as violets lift their shy, sweet cups to the dew. She thought it was the most beautiful voice she had ever heard —which probably it was.

Her uncle's talk had tortured her with anxiety for her father—an anxiety that never slept deep nor long, and that could not sleep even lightly again, until after the fifteenth; if haply then! But through all the black woof of her misery and dread, a silver thread of happiness shot—just the sound of an unknown man's voice, saying, "Does Citizen Majolin live here?"

She was glad—she had no thought why—she was glad she had heard that voice. It made the low, old room seem brighter, more homelike. She felt safer.

CHAPTER VI

THEN FATE TOOK A HAND

DOMINIQUE owned that Citizen Majolin lived here, but said cautiously, "And who shall I say wishes to see him?"

"Tell him—Citizen Poiret," the beautiful voice replied.

The room breathed a concerted sigh of relief, and de Clamorgan told de Morlève, "Admit him."

Monsieur de Morlève pulled back the door hospitably, and the stranger came in leisurely, and stood, hat in hand, smiling in their midst interrogatively, while they one and all inspected him curiously.

If Nature has her gentlefolk, she has, too, her high nobility. This was both: a prince unkempt, almost in rags. Historians have claimed that the French Revolution killed French manners—that no one in France knew how to curtsey after Jeanne Vaubernier la Comtesse du Barry had curtseyed to Death. And there is truth in the charge—but falsehood too. All real French have fine manners. And this was a courtier and a noticeable specimen of manhood. Tall, thirty-five perhaps, a strong, beautiful face to match the voice—a reckless face—dissipated-looking, stamped with suffering, lined with regrets. The somewhat tousled head held at a kingly angle. The mouth and eyes were strikingly beautiful; imperious, hazel-colored eyes that laughed and threatened with one glance, looking out from the shadow of lashes a woman might have envied—and many women had. But take him all in all, it was the man's mouth that was his most exceptional feature; large and clean. A man never had a stronger mouth, a woman rarely had one so beautiful, or so tender. Have *you* a beautiful mouth? If so, the unhappy chances are you've paid for it with a regrettable chin. Armand de

Trevières had paid no such feeble, receding price. His generous chin was as clearly drawn, as firmly molded, as the mouth. This was a large, lithe man—duly proportioned. His nose should have qualified him. for a Field-Marshal's baton—as Napoleon tested character. It claimed, and had its fair share of the face. He wore shabby clothes and. a general air of "gone under." But his eyes and his carriage belied that air. The carriage he could, and did, alter at will and need. The eyes betrayed him always; and that was where those long lashes came in—silky but utilitarian. His garments were shabby, the long, rough top-coat sagged, the light beaver hat, tall and broad-brimmed, was almost a scandal—the shabbiest of all—but the hand that held it was not. His hands betrayed him. In all Europe peasants never have such hands, except occasionally in Ireland and in Spain—and then only women. In short, the newcomer was striking in appearance, forceful and dominating—no doubt of that—even through his recklessness, a pleasant, attractive personality in spite of a cynical manner.

He came in easily—sauntered in—he stood easily, looked about him with cool, easy deliberation—smiled at the counter and the boxes, and then advanced confidently to de Clamorgan, saying, "Citizen Majolin?"

"What do you want?" the other demanded testily. "The shop is shut, and we are forbidden by law to sell anything after seven o'clock."

The stranger smiled. His smile matched his

mouth. "Have you any white flags?" he persisted.

"I do not stock that article," the shopkeeper said.

The stranger's good humor grew, and brimmed over in a light laugh. "Oh, yes," he contradicted, "I think you do; for those who come from the red field."

"I have not the slightest idea what you mean," de Clamorgan said rather unnecessarily—for he was quite convinced now. He drew the letter from his pocket and stood consulting it while Armand, debonair and assured, recited lightly, swaying a little on his feet, his eyes quite dancing:

"On my way here I passed three poplars on my right, and six oaks on my left."

"Three times six are seventeen." De Clamorgan made the ill-educated announcement.

"And seven make twenty-three," de Trevières capped it.

Even de Clamorgan's caution was surfeited now. He tossed the paper into the fire, held out his hand, and his tone had changed again. "Welcome Monsieur de Trevières!"

"You are the Marquis de Clamorgan?"

"Himself!" Clamorgan owned. "My dear friends," turning to the four listeners, "allow me to present you the Comte Armand de Trevières. Madame de Grisolles," he told de Trevières, "the Abbé Brochard, the Baron de Morlève—my niece, Mademoiselle de Chateaubriant."

Whatever had been forgotten at the Tuileries and at Malmaison, Laurette de Chateaubriant knew

how to curtsey. And Monsieur de Trevières's old hat swept the floor.

Very slowly the two young figures straightened up, the chestnut curls an instant after the head of dusk, and the hazel eyes looked down into the girl's eyes of gentian blue.

Laurette de Chateaubriant saw a manly-looking fellow with a strong, pleasant face, an upright, strong figure in a loose old coat that had lost a button and had one cuff frayed, a French gentleman masquerading as Citizen Poiret, and who, as she now knew, had come from London and personal safety to risk his life here, and take some important part in the desperate attempt to release and save her father.

Armand de Trevières saw—the room go round.

CHAPTER VII

THE UNDERSTUDY

"PRAY sit down!" the Marquis said. "Let us all sit down, and let us talk."

"I await your command, Marquis," Armand de Trevières said cordially. He was not sorry of this sturdy, secure chair. He had never felt so very oddly before. He must remember to eat more regularly. It would never do, at his job, to have rooms spin round, and his own silly head. Yes, it must be hunger that he felt—what a queer sort

of hungry feeling! He'd been hungry often enough, the Saints knew—but it had never made him feel quite like this. This was a foolish sort or feeling. And was a fellow's stomach so high up, and on the left side? He'd always understood—Oh! well——

"My dear Comte," the old Marquis was saying, "Cadonal has boasted to me of your courage and devotion. We shall need both."

"Both are entirely at your service," de Trevières said gravely.

"You are not afraid of death?" de Clamorgan said searchingly.

Armand de Trevières laughed. And from that moment the Abbé Brochard liked and trusted him. "Death!—the old fellow with the scythe is more afraid of me. I have pursued him frequently, but he has always managed to evade me." Tall words these! And yet every listener there knew that this was no boaster. And every eye, every ear, was riveted on Armand.

"All the better," the Marquis said drily, "for the mission on which I think of sending you is extremely dangerous."

"I am delighted to hear it," de Trevières returned lightly. "What is the nature of this mission?"

"You have heard of the Chevalier of the Purple Mask?"

"Naturally," Armand laughed.

"And of his great achievements in aid of our Cause?" The Marquis de Clamorgan spoke seri-

ously. He was ill-minded to have "Purple Mask" made light of: the man who had so served the Bourbon cause was no laughing matter—least of all for this out-at-elbow who had yet to prove himself.

But Armand de Trevières did not hear rebuke—it was not his way. And he said cynically, "I envy him his renown."

De Clamorgan's cold voice grew colder, and his old eyes very hard. "As a result of circumstances which I am not at liberty to disclose, it is impossible to make use of the Chevalier at this moment." De Trevières threw the toe of his own boot a slight confidential smile. "So the idea occurred to me to create a fictitious Chevalier, who will act in his place."

"Ah!" Armand de Trevières said enigmatically.

The Abbé looked at Madame de Grisolles, she looked at him. Laurette and de Morlève looked at the Marquis and then at the priest. All four were frankly surprised. The Abbé was displeased.

De Clamorgan paid no attention except to Armand, to whom he continued to speak. "His program will be to carry out a series of abductions. Will you, Monsieur de Trevières, consent to be this man, this understudy as it were—of the Purple Mask?"

The Comte's face trembled with some passing amusement, but he spoke gravely. "But how will that benefit the Cause?" he asked.

"By leaving the real Chevalier free to carry out

even more important work that we have on hand," de Clamorgan told him.

The Abbé Brochard was growing impatient. That last lie seemed to him unnecessary—and he disliked needless falsehood. And—to a man who was being asked to risk his life!

"What work is that?" de Trevières asked his host gravely, but suppressing an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh aloud; but the eyes that kept returning to Laurette in her demure corner sparkled with mirth.

"Surely it is not necessary——" Brochard broke in.

But de Clamorgan silenced him with a gesture. "Monsieur de Trevières," he said with cold courtesy, "you will forgive me, I am sure, but it is not necessary that you should know that."

Armand smiled good-naturedly. "I know at least," he said, "that you *have* some great project on hand."

"How do you know that?" the Marquis said sharply.

De Trevières replied, laughing, "From the simple fact that you make such a point of denying me any information on the subject."

The Marquis de Clamorgan rose, almost haughtily. "Monsieur de Trevières," he said stiffly, "we gain nothing by pursuing this subject. Do you accept or decline this mission?"

"To act as decoy duck for the Purple Mask—eh?" Armand de Trevières demanded with a com-

ical grimace—highly good-natured, imperturbable.

The Marquis winced. And three of the others looked at their leader, Madame almost ashamed, the men quite so. Laurette looked at Armand de Trevières with something very like apology in her dark blue eyes.

"Why put it like that?" the Marquis parried uncomfortably. "Let us rather say—to carry on this great work for the paramount Cause to which we are all so deeply devoted."

De Trevières bowed his devotion—to that One Cause—gravely. Then he added a syllable of demur. "H'm! Do I work under orders or on my own initiative?"

"I will instruct you whom you are to kidnap—beyond that you will have an entirely free hand," de Clamorgan replied.

"Then, on those conditions, I accept."

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMPACT

LE MARQUIS DE CLAMORGAN held out his hand with a sigh of relief, and de Trevières put his hand in it—and so the compact was sealed.

Madame, the Abbé, young de Morlève, looked relieved also. But Laurette de Chateaubriant looked distressed rather than relieved. It was not that she doubted this stranger, with the delicately

burly manner and the velvet voice—she did not doubt him. She had never felt so little doubt of any one before. Not that she did not desire her father's rescue, or that she desired it but coldly—she desired it more than she did all other earthly things except to see his Sacred Majesty Louis XVIII proclaimed and enthroned in Paris. It was her dream and her daily prayer that she might see that sacred august ceremony of the now exiled King's coronation, in the cathedral at Reims to which Joan of Arc had taken Charles VII, where the Grand Monarque, a boy of sixteen, had been anointed with the holy oil in the phial sent down from heaven for the baptism of Clovis, where his own martyred brother and the lovely Austrian had been crowned, where the Kings of France for countless years had knelt to receive the coronation blessing, amid the greatest excess of pomp and rite that the Church could contrive and command, to do honor to France—among the nations its eldest and fairest child—and to enhance the high prestige of her anointed kings. She was a brave girl, born of people who had been brave throughout the shine and storm of centuries. But, for this man, unseen and unknown an hour ago—all but unknown now—she was frightened. And the vicarious peril being heaped upon him—to which her own uncle was urging him—seemed to her unfair, ungenerous, unjustifiable.

He was nothing to her, of course, the great, big fellow in the queer old coat—less than nothing.

She had given her girlish heart long ago, and given it forever, to the Chevalier of the Purple Mask, the vivid, romantic figure of the Bourbon Cause. She loved him none the less passionately for that she had never seen him. She had vowed her heart to him, and her very life, and she would keep her vow none the less loyally, even if she were to see him never. She knew that she well might never see him. Even now, her uncle had said that the Chevalier had disappeared, could not be found, had left no trace. Like as not he had already given his devoted life to their Country and their King. But, even so; all the more so for that, she would love him, and him alone, to her last day—praying for him, mourning him, devoting her life to him and to Our Lady's service in some convent-quiet when haply Mother Church should come back to France with Louis. The Chevalier was her knight. She was his handmaiden—forever and forever. But—it hurt her that this other man should be hurt! Surely a girl's charity might go so far! And it humiliated her that he should be treated shabbily, unfairly even, under the roof that she called home, and by the kinsman who had been to her a father.

But de Clamorgan was saying—

"I must not conceal from you that your task will be beset with difficulties."

De Trevières dismissed that a little contemptuously with a light shrug, "I like difficulties." And Brochard, watching closely, knew that he spoke the pure truth.

"If you are arrested in the place of the Chevalier," de Clamorgan insisted on, "you will inevitably suffer the penalty for him."

"Then I must make it my business not to be arrested," the other said heartily. But Laurette was shredding her tiny hankerchief. "Do I disguise myself as the redoubtable Chevalier?" he added, evidently highly amused at the idea. The priest still watching wondered at the frolic in his eye.

"You must wear his cloak and mask," de Clamorgan said.

"But not his clothing?"

"It is not necessary," the Marquis told him.

"That's a pity," the substitute said oddly. And again he seemed highly amused.

"You shall have as much money as you wish for a new outfit," Monsieur de Clamorgan assured him.

"You are very kind," de Trevières said gravely. "It will come just in the nick of time," he added with a comedy grimace at his threadbare habiliments. "And when do I make my *début* in the purple?"

"As soon as possible," the Marquis begged.

"Immediately then," was the prompt answer. "And whom am I to kidnap first? I should like to celebrate my first appearance by something really startling." The odd fellow was tremulous with suppressed mirth.

"We have just heard," the Marquis continued, "that Orsanelli, the new Prefect of the Eure, leaves Paris to-morrow morning, to take up his new ap-

pointment. In the evening he will be at Evreux. You must kidnap him from the Prefecture itself."

As he spoke de Clamorgan watched the stranger narrowly. But de Trevières was no whit daunted by the stupendous order.

"It shall be done," he said promptly. "At midnight, to-morrow, he shall be my prisoner. And when I have him?"

"You will take him to a farmer at Pont-de-l'Arche who is devoted to our cause," de Clamorgan answered. "His name is Jacques Cros. And you will release Orsanelli only on the payment of ten thousand livres."

De Trevières nodded. "I quite understand. Is that all? Then," rising, "I must be off."

They all arose, even Madame de Grisolles.

"But, my dear Comte," the Marquis urged, "we are just going to sit down to dinner. You will give us the pleasure of your company?"

De Trevières was tempted. For an instant he wavered, sending a quick glance to Laurette. She did not catch it, but the Abbé did—and so did Raoul de Morlève.

"You are very kind," Armand de Trevières said, "but I must waste as little time as possible. Remember I have my costume to prepare."

"Ah! true!" de Clamorgan said regretfully. "Your cloak and mask are already prepared. I will go and get them. Friends, you will say good-by to Monsieur de Trevières, and begin dinner without me. It is late, and we have work which

will take us all night." And he went from the room.

The old priest turned to de Trevières and took in both his frail old hands the man's strong right hand. "Monsieur," he said earnestly, "I need not tell you that you take with you all our hopes for your success."

The Comte bent his head in courtesy and in respect; and very solemnly the old man blessed him.

"I too, Monsieur, wish you every success." And Raoul de Morlève held out his hand.

"Thank you," de Trevières said simply, "I shall succeed. I must."

"It is a masterly stroke—a brilliant idea," Brochard said as he and Raoul passed through the door.

Madame de Grisolles held out her hand as de Trevières dropped de Morlève's. "Monsieur," she said, as Armand bent over her fingers "should any misfortune happen to you, have you any relation whom you would like to be informed?"

"Thank Heaven, I haven't a relation in the world," the man said gayly.

"Some lady, perhaps, to whom you are betrothed?" Valentine de Grisolles persisted.

He sent a glance to Laurette—a glance so swift and short that neither woman was quite sure that it had been; and then he laughed merrily. "Betrothed!" he cried. "Me? Look at me, Madame —is it likely?"

"In these days," she told him gravely, "perhaps

you are fortunate in that. Then—good-by, Monsieur."

"Au revoir, Madame," de Trevières said as she ascended the little staircase. She turned at its top, and smiled a little sadly, and bowed again to him.

He waved his hand, laughing, and then bowed low. "Au revoir, Madame."

But she had gone, and he and Laurette were alone.

CHAPTER IX

"LADY, IF I PROFANE——"

FOR the first time in his life the man was at a loss. He wanted to say something to this girl; if only to make her lift her eyes to his, that he might take one long look into their radiant blue, but not a word would come to him.

But she was at no loss, either for speech or act. She came up quite close to him—so close that his startled heart pounded at his ribs, crying to get to her—and said softly, "Monsieur le Comte, it is my turn"—("Oh, holy Saints, how sweet the child's smile is," he thought)—"let me give you my warmest wishes for your success. You have accepted a most difficult undertaking, Monsieur. The Chevalier is such an extraordinary man——"

"Extraordinary?" he smiled down at her.

"Don't you think so?" The question was quick and imperative.

"Oh," de Trevières laughed, "certainly I do, Mademoiselle. But I undertake to equal his exploits."

The girl shook her head. She pitied this stranger now—his presumption was pathetic, she thought. "Oh!" she said, her young face kindling with enthusiasm until her beauty was riotous, "he is so original—so dramatic——"

De Trevières interrupted her, smiling at her ardor. "Sometimes a little too dramatic," he said deprecatingly. "His flamboyant motto, for instance —'I take what I will!' "

The roses in her face deepened haughtily. "Monsieur," she said abruptly, "I do not like the tone in which you speak of the Chevalier."

A strange something kindled in the man's face. But he answered very gently, "Then I will speak of him exactly as you tell me . . ."

"He is a hero. I admire his courage—his boldness——"

"He only acts at night—under a mask," the man said imprudently.

The girl flamed. "Monsieur de Trevières," she said coldly, "I am afraid that you and I shall never be friends."

"I am distressed to hear you say that, Mademoiselle," he said as if he meant it.

"I cannot bear any slighting remarks on the Chevalier. *He* is *my* hero. I almost worship him."

Armand de Trevières looked at her oddly.

Something sharp pricked at his side. Something hot pounded in his veins, throbbed at his temples. "Happy man," he whispered lightly, and added aloud, "You know him personally then?"

"I have never seen him," Laurette said. "But I have always pictured him as I should like him to be." De Trevières caught his breath, and listened anxiously for her next words. But the description he had hoped for, and feared, did not come. She said unhappily, almost complainingly, "Now I am afraid that I shall only be able to imagine him as looking like you."

"That certainly must be very disappointing," de Trevières admitted mockingly. But there was a bitterness and a hint even of sorrow as well as of cynicism in his bantering tone—and that hurt her.

"Oh, forgive me," she cried contritely. "I let my tongue run away with me. It is a wicked, foolish tongue. But, Monsieur, it is not entirely my own fault—not quite entirely. My uncle and his friends think that I am too young to be trusted with their schemes—I have heard more to-night than I have ever heard before—and so, I am left very much alone, and when I meet any one by chance, as you and I have met, I speak my thoughts too freely—just as I might if I were alone."

"Mademoiselle"—de Trevières's voice trembled a little with his earnestness—"I like you to talk to me in that way—I cannot tell you how much—I dare not. I shall be very happy, if I can believe

that in thinking of the Chevalier you will sometimes think too of me."

"But you must be prudent!" she said suddenly. "Oh, Monsieur, beware of the agents of Fouché, and above all beware of a terrible man called Brisquet."

"Brisquet? Who is this Brisquet?"

"An odious wretch," Laurette replied, "and the cleverest of all Fouché's police."

"Ah!—I will make a special note of Monsieur Brisquet," de Trevières told her.

"I shall hardly breathe till I know you are safely returned from Evreux," she said with a sigh, and a very charming little smile.

Armand Comte de Trevières flushed crimson. It was carnival time in his man's veins—high carnival.

"I am very grateful, Mademoiselle," he said softly, "for your charming interest in—the Chevalier."

"You are laughing at me," Laurette said ruefully.

"On the contrary," the man said seriously, "I am quite in earnest."

Laurette de Chateaubriant searched his face with suspicious blue eyes, and then accepted its avowal of sincerity.

"You will succeed," she said; "I feel it." And she held out her hand.

The hand that took it quickly trembled a little. But he said lightly, smiling, "Of course I shall!"

Laurette looked up at him fearlessly, simply.

"You are so big, and strong!" she exclaimed approvingly.

"And you," he told her reverently, looking down at her with a great light in his eyes, "are very small and gentle. May I——?"

He raised her hand slowly towards his face, but did not bend his lips to it—waiting her permission.

The young thing paled a little, and then flushed prettily. She hesitated—half drew her hand away—Armand Trevières made no effort to retain it—she took it away—then—at something in his eyes, or at something in her own breast, perhaps—she gravely gave it back to him. And he bent his head and kissed it very gently.

He knew now what had ailed him half an hour ago—and ailed him still. It was not hunger, no corporeal pang for meat or bread—it was intoxication, he was intoxicated with the exquisite loveliness his thirsty eyes had drunk, and his dry, thirsting heart.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," he said earnestly—in the tension of his emotion whispering it—"Thank you. That will help me."

"Oh," Laurette complained—but a dimple came—(and crazed him)—"now you are laughing at me again. How could it—help you?"

His eyes flashed an imperious answer to hers. And hot words—true words—pounded to his trembling lips, and might have been spoken to her startled ear, for intoxication is a great truth-teller, tells great truths roughly and suddenly sometimes,

intoxication of heart as well as the grosser intoxication of those who have misused the vine.

But the glad inebriation was not spoken—yet—for the Marquis de Clamorgan's step sounded near the door.

CHAPTER X

STOP THIEF!

DE CLAMORGAN came in, carrying on his arm a folded cloak. "Here, my dear Comte," he said briskly, "are your mask and cloak. Forgive me that I have been so long. Believe me, it was not an old man's legs that lagged. But these impedimenta were safely stowed away. To unearth them was tortuous: it took time. And here are two thousand livres. That should be sufficient for all needs."

"More than sufficient," the Comte assured him. "A thousand thanks. Au revoir, Marquis! We shall meet again—soon!"

"Au revoir, my dear friend," the older man rejoined. "All my best wishes go with you for the success of your enterprise."

De Trevières grasped the proffered hand, before he turned to Laurette and said, "And you, Mademoiselle, do not you too wish me luck?"

"That would be useless," she told him—with sparkling eye and flushing cheek, "since I *know* that you will succeed."

"Your confidence in—the Chevalier——" he retorted laughingly, "makes it impossible for me to fail. Mademoiselle de Chateaubriant, *I have* succeeded!—au revoir!" and he was gone, cloak and mask stuffed inside his greatcoat.

The Marquis watched him a moment from the street door, then closed and bolted it. "And now, Laurette," he said, returning to her, "we will go to dinner. It is high time. You should not have waited for me. Come, child!"

"Yes, Uncle," the girl said dreamily. But she took no steps towards the door that he held open for her. She stood thinking—and he waited patiently, and watched her. He was always patient with his niece—and he watched her often. He liked to gauge the quiet working of her gentle mind. And usually he did it accurately.

"Uncle!"

"Yes, my child?"

"So your great plan is to rescue my father?"

"Yes," he told her tenderly, "it is, little one—our grand coup!"

"And you never told me!"

"You are too young, my little one," her uncle replied, "to bear the burden of these plots and conspiracies. Almost sometimes, the weight of them and the sharp edge of their uncertainty bruise and blister my back, and cut my heart in two. Not the dangers—they are nothing—but the delays—and delay piled upon delay—they are purgatory. Your delicate shoulders, mignon, should know no load

heavier or rougher than a little chain of fragrant flowers."

"But my father!" she urged, taking de Clamorgan's hand, holding it gratefully. "You might have told me, my uncle! How long has my poor father been in the prison of Rouen?"

"Two years—in Rouen."

"And I never knew! Have you had any news of him during that time?"

"A very little," the Marquis answered sadly. "I fear he has been ill."

"Ill!" the girl cried, and her eyes flushed with heavy, sudden tears.

"Can you wonder?" her uncle asked. "That proud spirit fretting, chafing in a dungeon—insulted by peasants, taunted by regicides."

Laurette de Chateaubriant was sobbing softly. De Clamorgan put his arm about her tenderly. "Laurette," he said, "can you remember your father?"

"Oh, yes! But not so clearly as I often pray that I may do. His voice, his eyes, the touch of his dear hands upon my hair, his always kindness to me, a doll he mended, my hand he tore his neckerchief (because it was softest) to bind when a bee had stung me, a song he used to sing until I slept on his strong knee—but his face—no! That I cannot remember well."

"His face will have changed!" the old Marquis said bitterly.

"Oh, my father!" Laurette wept. "My poor

father! my dear father! old, ill, in prison, and, worst of all, alone. Ah!" and she dried her eyes and broke away from her uncle confidently—"But —the Chevalier will alter all that!"

"Um!" de Clamorgan shook his old head anxiously—"We hope so! We hope so!"

Laurette lifted her head proudly. Her tears were done. Confidence and trust shone like twin blue stars from her eyes. "Has he not sworn to rescue him?" she said.

"Laurette," Monsieur de Clamorgan said earnestly, "listen to me, my little one. You have heard of the delays and difficulties in connection with the Chevalier. But you have heard not half, comprehended not one-tenth. What they are, how great they are, only we, who have lived among them all these miserable years, can realize, and even we realize but in part. We must not set our hopes too high!"

"I set my highest hopes on—the Chevalier," Laurette de Chateaubriant said dreamily. And the girl was indeed dreaming—an old, old dream that is always young, fresh and dewy as summer's flowers. "I am sure that he is brave and strong," the young girl mused on aloud—a tender, far-off smile on her curved red lips. "I know he is. He will succeed. He will surmount them all—those dangers and difficulties, so many and so grave."

Jean Paul Philippe de Clamorgan stood eyeing her curiously. "Come, come," he said with a sigh. "Are you coming, Laurette?"

"I am coming, Uncle," she said—still in a dream —and, taking up in both her hands the one lamp still lit, she went slowly still smiling from the room. Her uncle followed her, closing the door as he passed through it.

The little shop room was left in total darkness— the busy little room where women of fashion chattered shrilly, gesticulated excitedly, and bought hats and laces at ruinous prices extravagantly through half the daylight hours, and the most determined Royalists in France hatched terrible plans relentlessly, and worked out their gruesome details unfalteringly through half the night hours —through all the night sometimes.

And Armand de Trevières was trudging across Paris, humming an old love tune, of old Provence, under his breath, a tender smile on his handsome mouth, a tiny, torn, stolen handkerchief snuggled against his heart.

CHAPTER XI

"WHITHER THOU GOEST"

IN an attic on the Rue de Grace an old Breton woman bent anxiously over a casserole bubbling savorily on a cosy fire. Her face was as rosy as a red, red apple, and more wrinkled than it was rosy—and her sloe-black eyes were as bright and snapping as her well-tended fire. And you

could have seen that her figure was trim and upright still, when she bent up from the cooking, and went to the door—for the third time in ten minutes, to listen if Monsieur de Trevières was coming.

Not yet! She shut the door again with a snap, and with a sigh.

"Your supper will be quite spoiled—and the wine too warm," she scolded her absent lodger. She bent again and shifted the bottle of claret an inch or two, and lifted the lid again from the brown casserole. No—the poulet smoking on its spicy bed of mushrooms was quite as it should be still. Another quarter of an hour and it must be ruined. All the Saints send him home before then—and with the wish she crossed herself devoutly—for no French atheist this—but an honest Catholic, loyal and devoted to her God and to her King. A tiny red lamp burned before the little statue of Our Lady on the wall—a pot of mignonette on one side of the little shrine, a pot of musk on the other. Catholics were allowed their prayers in Paris now. Bonaparte thought it wisest so. He himself was more Mahometan than Catholic, and more under the thrall of the fortune-tellers, who were rife in Paris then even more, and more openly, than now, than he was sincerely influenced by any god-cult—but he feared to antagonize Christianity further, more than he disliked conciliating it. So, one by one, the old leathern doors were to swing open at the portals of the Paris churches, and old Lucette was free to light her little candle of blessed yellow

wax, and to tell her beads, beneath the little gracious, blue-clad bisque Virgin, and before her tiny Saint Urlose of the yellow glaze. The insignia of her earthly loyalty she wore less openly—but she wore it. On one old brown arm, had you stripped the sleeve away, you would have seen a lily tattooed heavily in white. It had been brown, the girl's arm, when at the first far-off threatenings of Revolution Lucette had clenched her teeth bravely, and held it out to the tattooer's ruthless needle—brown enough to show the royal flower in all its whiteness. But it was browner now, with the deep, dark tan of age and work and years of sunburn (for Lucette had not lived in Paris long), and because time had dyed the woman's old skin so much darker, the fast, white pigment pricked into it showed the whiter. And so, for all that she had suffered, and seen suffered and inflicted, in the Terror and since, the great Lily of Bourbon loyalty in old Lucette's fierce, indomitable heart grew and burned the whiter and the stronger with the hard passing of the years.

But the Saints be praised! Monsieur's step was on the stair at last. Ah! how tired he must be—and famished. Lucette was curtseying at the threshold when he came in, waited to take his coat and hat, and then, as he threw himself appreciatively in the comfortable chair near the hearth, she flew to make the salade. It was impossible to have made that in advance. A simmering chicken, mushrooms altogether ready, might wait a gour-

met's coming, with skillful Lucette to mind and coddle them—and even the perfectly-temperatured claret—but a salade, once dressed, never! A salade could not be kept waiting even an instant when once the incompatibility of oil and vinaigre has been overcome.

But the salade did not take her long. The lettuce and the cucumber were in the open window—to keep them crisp and cool. The mint she plucked from the window-box, just three or four tender young leaves. It took those strong, capable brown fingers but a moment to cut the head of garlic and rub with it the salade bowl. A moment more and the admirable dressing was made, the salade tossed sufficiently and carried to the table. And in a trice, the casserole white-napkined at his plate, the wine uncorked to his glass, a crème, a dish of fruit, cheese, butter, and rolls of bread as crisp as the salade, and "Monsieur le Comte is served!"

"By Jove! served indeed! Served like a prince!" he cried, rising and sitting down to the good things she had provided.

"Eat well," she told him. "Monsieur must be very hungry."

"True," he laughed, "I am—very. But I had forgotten it."

A long draught of the red wine; a mouthful of the poulet—and he laid down his fork—but only for a moment—and said gratefully, "You are very good to me, Madame!"

"You serve my King!" she said. "I am your

servant. And I serve Monsieur le Comte de Trevières none the less gladly because I too am of Quimperlé. I was born in the farmhouse at the bottom of the hill on which the Château stood, not far from the Ursuline Convent."

"Ah," he said, holding out his hand, and she knelt and kissed it—as was her birthright, for he was her seigneur. "Ah, there is not much of it standing now!" he said sadly.

"Nothing Monsieur, my master," old Lucette agreed, rising; "nothing but memories. But they are very proud ones."

An hour before he had sought out the shop of Majolin these two had met for the first time. A friend—in English Twickenham—had bade him lodge with her when in Paris. And a line—barely four words in a hand she knew, unsigned, unaddressed—that had been written too in Twickenham, and conveyed an order from one in Russia—had won him her kindest welcome. But it had not told his name other than Poiret.

But even without that line in the fine, spidery hand, they would have been destined friends. They liked and trusted each other on the instant, and would, even without the royal command to do so. And because he purposed to employ her importantly on the morrow, or even sooner, he had told her his name, as he hurried away. (And to have spoken that name too freely in Paris might well have cost him his head.)

She had crossed herself when she heard it, and

had stood looking after him with brimming eyes—until his tall figure had gone out of sight.

Then she had ripped open the mattress on her bed in the next room, taken out the smallest of the four bags hidden there, seized a shawl and hurried out—feverish to be in time to buy the best in Paris before the shops were closed. And hence the fire—for the May night was chill—the good wine, the delicate food. There were new fine linen sheets on the old bed now, and a down coverlet. There was breakfast fit for a prince indeed in the tiny larder. And too she had bought a new candle—a splendid one of costliest wax—for Our Lady, in heartfelt gratitude that her lord and master was to shelter even for an hour beneath her roof, warm at her fire, feed of her bread. The poulet had cost twelve francs. She wished it might have cost as many livres.

While he sat by the fire again and sipped the coffee she brought him, they talked together as friends and comrades—but too as lord and serf. And still she served him, heaping in the sweet spicy cones for his warmth, watching his every glance, his every gesture for a command or a hinted wish.

They talked of Twickenham and Avignon, and of lovely Quimperlé, hill-girt, garden-gay and thrice river-girdled. He told her of those she worshiped, and she told him old tales of his race—some were new to him, others not, but all were good hearing from those eloquent, loyal old lips.

He told her of his mission, and of the aids she

was to render—a horseman stationed here, a coach waiting there—a confederate to his hand in the Prefecture itself—a message delivered at dawn to a servant of Fouché's, a servant who was true to the Prefect, another to one who was not. And she promised all. She had "friends." All could be done.

He took out the purse de Clamorgan had given him and counted the livres with reluctant fingers and unhappy face.

"It is not enough?" Lucette said concernedly.

"Twice too much," he told her—"but I would to God I need not use one sou of it."

She did not ask him why. That was not her place. But she went into the other room, tore open again the bed she had so carefully prepared for him, and came back bringing him her hoard of years. That *was* her place.

"Monsieur le Comte, we need use none of the money of Monsieur de Clamorgan," she said simply. "Here is three times as much of our own." And she held out three little cloth bags.

Armand de Trevières took them, and the knotted old brown hands with them.

"Thank you, mother," he said quietly. "Six thousand livres?"

"Two thousand in each pouch, Monsieur."

"And all for me?"

"They all *are* yours," she told him.

De Trevières laughed; but there were tears in his mirth, and a lump in his throat.

"Then keep them for me," he commanded.

"Monsieur!" she pleaded.

He sat for a few moments—thinking, and she stood watching him anxiously—a handsome old creature, straight and clear-eyed as a girl. Her face was tired and wrinkled, her hands almost deformed from over-work. But she had a rich something of beauty; and an artist would have chosen to paint her rather than to paint Armand le Comte de Trevières—or even pretty Mademoiselle Laurette de Chateaubriant.

Well—why not? She had said but the truth as he as well as she held it. She was his. He owned her, as his fathers had owned hers for centuries. Since she was his, her money was his—his very own. Why should he spend the dole of Monsieur de Clamorgan, when he had and to spare of his own? De Clamorgan's money was given not to him himself, but to the Cause, of course. But his repugnance to eat or sup or wear or lodge or journey of it was almost insurmountable. And he need not. But Lucette was old—childless—alone. She might need. No, he could not risk that.

"Hold out your hands—together, so!" he commanded.

And she obeyed him, of course, promptly, pleading still in her old eyes, but none from her tongue. She held out her hands, palms up, pressed together into a crinkled cup.

And in it the Comte de Trevières laid two of the

three bags she had brought him, and the purse de Clamorgan had given him.

"So," he said, "I take two thousand livres of our own. Keep our four thousand and the two thousand of Monsieur le Clamorgan—until I come for them. If I do not come within the week, all are yours. And in the meantime use the money as if I had never seen it. I command that: see that you obey. But use Monsieur le Marquis's last of all. That I will return, and replace with my kind banker"—he made her a courtly inclination with his head—"if I live."

And then he suddenly told her of Laurette—because he could not be silent of her longer—told it a little stammeringly, but proudly too, like a man—and freely, for this peasant woman, found but to-day in Paris, for all that was his very own; and had been for centuries. And so he told her—something. And what he did not tell the sharp-witted Frenchwoman understood as well as if he had.

And then he cried out in self-reproach and vain regret: "Oh, if I could recall the wasted years, the wicked, vagrant hours, the spendthrift days; I am not worthy. She is so exquisite—so pure—a flower—a melody—the girl I love!"

He laid his head on the table and moaned the bitter old moan of useless regret.

Old Lucette bent over him and laid her hand tenderly on his hair. "Be of good cheer, mon fils," she soothed. "Love wipes out all that. Men must pluck the poison-nettle and be stung by it before

they can truly see the beauty of the rose. Gold outlasts the fire. Be of good cheer, mon brave. You will return from Evreux. I know you will. You will succeed. And you will take the old Duc safely to England till happier days have come—and Mademoiselle too—and—perhaps old Lucette might follow you—who knows? You said the fricassée was good," she ended eagerly.

Armand rose and took her face in both his hands, and laughed at her tenderly. "So—so!" he said, "and would you leave France, and follow me to cold and fog and exile? Leave France and be homeless too!"

"Where the Seigneur de Trevières is is my home," Lucette said proudly. "Where his Comtesse is—and her babe—would be France to me, and there my old fingers should find their business and their pleasure. I can sew as well as cook, Monsieur."

"You shall come—if you still wish—when I go back," he said abruptly, almost harshly. But his eyes were full. "And now," he added quickly, "I must to work."

But he had not much to do to-night, for as he had come here from Majolin his quick brain had already thought out his plan of action, even to small details. Armand de Trevières was no dawdler.

He wrote three letters now and sealed them—and then went to sleep on Lucette's bed, again

freshly made by loving hands and sweet with lavender.

She had little wish for bed—and she knelt a long time before the little blue Mary praying for her lord's welfare. And to good Saint Urlose—because he was the guardian of all Bretons—she also prayed and vowed a taper.

At dawn she woke him, and when he had dressed and breakfasted, he gave the letters of his last night's writing into her care—to be delivered as he bade, should she not see or hear of him again—one envelope was blank; it was to go by hand to Twickenham—one addressed to Citizen Majolin—the third was to be sent carefully, as addressed, to a man in London—a man named Cadonal.

Just before he left he stood a moment at Lucette's cheap little shrine—and presently he broke off a spray of the mignonette—and Lucette made no protest. He laid it an instant on the bisque figure's azure robe, and then he folded it away in a tiny handkerchief, and put both back, inside his coat, above his heart.

"She is very, very like mignonette," he said softly—"more like that than anything else I know—gentle, piquante, lovely, and very, very sweet."

At the door he bent his head and Lucette lifted her knotted hands and blessed him. And again he cupped the wrinkled face in his hands. And this time he bent down and kissed it.

CHAPTER XII

WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL

THEY dined at last at No. 18—on the 11th of May—Laurette and her uncle as well as the earlier others. And then they scattered, as they so often did, to their separate occupations: Laurette to pray, to dream, to think. She had a great deal to pray for, a great deal to think of—her father, and his peril—and the safety of the missing Chevalier, the real Chevalier; the Abbé, de Clamorgan and Raoul de Morlève to consult and plan; Valentine de Grisolles to write letters—she said.

But Laurette could not rest. And she determined to slip out into the garden for a while. She thought it might rest and soothe her to be alone there—alone in the calm night air, alone with the stars and the night. The tiny garden was her own. The Marquis had preserved it—at some cost to the convenience of the shop itself—for her pleasaunce. But he would be angry with her if she went out into the night air quite uncovered—foolish of the dear uncle, of course, but she was a good child, and would not willingly disobey him. She caught up a shawl—and then threw it down; she had remembered a fichu she had thought uncommonly pretty to-day when Constance was showing it to a customer; and when the woman had gone Laurette had secured it, meaning to take it to her own room and

keep it for herself. She had tossed it on a chair, and forgotten it. But she would get it now—and it would do to wrap about her shoulders, in case the dear, kind uncle saw her.

The shop was in utter darkness.

Madame de Grisolles came softly down the little staircase. She was cloaked and bonneted. She crept across the room stealthily, drew out the street door key and pocketed it. Her hand was on the bolt—when her anxious ear caught a slight noise. She dropped her hand noiselessly at her side, and stood absolutely motionless—listening. The sound came nearer. A door opened. Laurette, a little lamp in her hand, came in. Madame de Grisolles bit her lip, and waited. Laurette found her fichu, threw it about her neck, and was just going as she had come when she caught sight of Valentine and halted, surprised and stupefied. And for an awkward moment the two women regarded each other steadily—in silence.

Laurette spoke first, putting her lamp on the counter. "Madame de Grisolles! You are going out? So late?"

"I am not feeling very well," the Comtesse said indifferently; "I thought a little air might refresh me."

"But do you think it wise to go out alone—at night—in Paris?"

"Oh—as to that—why not? No one knows me. I am not suspected by the police. I shall be back in an hour."

"But you will catch cold," the girl persisted, "and I think you are not wrapped up warmly enough." She went to Valentine and felt with her hands the thickness of the shawl. "It is not enough," she said. "I am sure you should have more than this."

She drew the cashmere solicitously more closely about the other's throat, and as she fussed at it, some thing, and then another, slipped from its folds and slithered to the floor. Both women stooped quickly to pick them up. Laurette reached them first, and securing them, held them out to the Comtesse apologetically—"Here they are, Madame——" But quite mechanically, as she held them, the lamplight falling on them, she read the address on one of the envelopes. She drew back her hand sharply, read the other address, and uttered a horrified cry.

"Give them to me!" Madame de Grisolles said sternly.

"'To Citizen Fouché, Prefect of Police'!" the girl read aloud amazedly.

"Give me those letters, Laurette," the woman said coldly.

Without replying, Laurette read out the other superscription—horror and loathing in her tone: "'To Citizen Brisquet, 28 Rue du Bac.'"

"My letters!" Valentine cried impatiently.

Laurette de Chateaubriant faced the other woman sternly, searchingly. "Madame, what does this mean?" she said.

But Madame de Grisolles only repeated, "I insist on you giving me those letters."

"Never!" the girl said.

"There is nothing in them that affects you," the Comtesse told her.

"Then let me read them," came the quick retort.

"Impossible!"

"Why?" Laurette demanded.

"Oh, child, be reasonable," the other said. "What is it you suspect?"

"Nothing yet," the girl said excitedly—"nothing *and* everything—I dare suspect nothing—ah! it would be too horrible—and yet——" She looked about her helplessly, distraught. "I shall call my uncle!" she said firmly—her mind made up to something at last.

"Ah, don't do that," Valentine de Grisolles pleaded, almost in a frenzy too. "It would distress him, Laurette. Indeed, indeed it would!"

"Then I shall open these letters," Laurette said haughtily.

"I forbid you to do so," the Comtesse retorted as haughtily.

Laurette de Chateaubriant hesitated a moment.

"One of the two I will do—which you like, Madame. Either I read these letters, but only with your permission, of course, or I call my uncle—for that I need no permission. Which, Madame?"

Valentine shrugged her shoulders. She had recovered her equanimity quite. "Very well, then," she said coldly, insolently almost, "read them."

Mademoiselle de Chateaubriant waited for no second permission, for none more cordial: in wrenching the one, scant and unwilling as it was, breeding had claimed enough, where loyalty might so well have claimed all. Men were risking their lives for the white lilies every hour; a mere girl as French as they, as bravely born, every thought as loyal, could risk some slight infringement of the exquisite manners that centuries of gentle French living, and the good Sister Marie Xavier, had taught; omit some "by-your-leave-Madame," some suavity of petitioning, in her eager young sentinelling at one loophole of the King's Cause. She broke open one letter's seal ruthlessly, drew out the sheet, and read aloud, in a steady young voice, that grew so cold with anger as it read that it seemed to chill the room, "The Citizen Prefect is warned that the Purple Mask is to kidnap Monsieur Orsanelli, Prefect of the Eure, as soon as he arrives at Evreux, from the Prefecture itself, on the stroke of midnight. A Friend."

Laurette shot her a wicked look, but Valentine Comtesse de Grisolles was smiling in proud contempt. The girl tore open the second letter, and plucked out its meaning with quick angry eyes. "The same to Brisquet! Oh! Horrible! Odious! Treachery!"

"Treachery!" In all its vivid vocabulary the language of the French aristocrat has no other word so ugly or so base.

Madame de Grisolles tossed it back with flash-

ing, wrathful eyes, and a proud uplift of her head. But she said nothing—and her lips still smiled.

Laurette rushed to the inner door—Valentine made not a gesture to stay her—and threw it open, calling excitedly, "Uncle! My uncle! Monsieur l'Abbé! Monsieur de Morlève! Come! Come to me! Come quickly!"

CHAPTER XIII

AVE MARIA!

RAOUL DE MORLÈVE reached her first. His were the youngest legs; and his ear was always quick to the voice of Laurette de Chateaubriant. Armand Comte de Trevières was not the first to give her sudden love. He was but one of three—three who would love her while they lived: and she was such a slip of a girl, almost a child, frail, petite—neither so noticeable nor so sumptuous in her delicate loveliness as Madame de Grisolles, queenly, classic, superb. Men are made so.

And about this girl charm clung as indescribable and as irresistible as the perfume of a flower. Slender, winsome women are often dowered so.

Raoul reached her first. But the priest and Laurette's uncle came close after the Baron.

"What is it?" de Clamorgan asked, and Brochard said, "What is it?" both speaking calmly.

Both were well used to sudden alarums, and self-control and invincible calm were implements of their loyalty: a loyalty that was always on guard, always alert. De Morlève asked her nothing—save with his eyes—but he went near to her, and waited to hear, and to obey.

"We are betrayed!" Laurette exclaimed hysterically.

De Clamorgan shot Madame de Grisolles a question from his eyes. She shrugged her shoulders slightly, nodded her head regretfully, smiled coldly. He understood, and sighed. And after this brief telepathy they two stood immovable and calm, and waited for the tiny storm to spend itself.

"Betrayed!" the Abbé and Monsieur de Morlève echoed in consternation, and the Abbé added judicially, "By whom?"

"By Madame!" Laurette almost hissed it, pointing a dramatic finger at the Comtesse.

"Ah, no!" de Morlève said chivalrously, shaking his head. He knew that there was some mistake.

But Monsieur l'Abbé said merely, "What!" and the word was as much a search for detail as an incredulity. He had lived too long to be greatly surprised at anything. He had heard too many confessions to feel over-sure of any woman.

"Read these letters!" the girl said triumphantly —remember she was very young and highly excited. She handed one to Brochard, who studied it carefully, de Morlève reading it feverishly from over

the priest's shoulder. Laurette held out the other letter to her uncle, and when he did not move to come for it, she ran to him and thrust it in his hand. He took it with a slight shrug—or rather, he did not let it fall; his acceptance and his tenure were no more than that—and he did not trouble to glance at it.

"Abominable!" the Abbé said it quietly, but it was anathema.

But Raoul de Morlève said, "Incredible!" not quite convinced even by his own eyes. He had never been a confessor, and he found it difficult, even with proof, to doubt a woman of his own caste.

Then de Clamorgan spoke. "Gentlemen," he said haughtily, "I beg you to be calm."

"Madame de Grisolles is a traitress!" Laurette panted in.

De Clamorgan gave her a stern look. To the men he said, "Listen!"

"But who could have——" de Morlève began.

"I command you!" the Marquis interrupted him, and Raoul de Morlève bowed his head. "Laurette," her uncle said more coldly than he had ever before spoken to the more than orphan girl, "you have made a most unfortunate blunder."

"My uncle!" she faltered incredulously.

"I beg," he said, bowing to Valentine de Grisolles with some ceremony, "that you will pardon her, Madame."

The Comtesse returned his bow and smiled—not unpleasantly. "Since the contents of these letters are known, Monsieur, tell them the exact truth," she urged.

"Yes," de Clamorgan replied reluctantly enough, "you are right. It is the wisest course." He turned then to Brochard and de Morlève—Laurette he ignored. "My friends," he said, "you must forgive me"—but he said it proudly—"if I have concealed from you a part of my plan. I wrote those letters."

"You!" they both exclaimed—and so also did Laurette. And the Abbé added, "With what intention?"

"All our hopes are based on the rescue of the Duc," he answered firmly. "And there is only one man capable of carrying out this bold stroke—our Chevalier of the Mask."

"But you heard what Fouché said, my uncle"—Laurette broke in—"They have been warned——"

"Precisely," de Clamorgan said dryly. "That is why I have employed de Trevières to impersonate the real Chevalier, and have arranged that he shall be captured."

"Captured!" Laurette protested passionately.

"I do not like it," Brochard said under his breath.

"Arrested and imprisoned," the Marquis de Clamorgan continued haughtily. "Only then will Bonaparte and Fouché be satisfied; only then will the police relax their vigilance. There was no other way. There is no other way. That is why I am giving notice to Fouché and Brisquet of the hour

at which the kidnapping of Orsanelli is to take place, so that no possible chance of safety or escape may remain for the Comte de Trevières. You say you do not like it, Monsieur l'Abbé," he concluded sternly, "and your face says so too, Monsieur de Morlève. *I* neither like nor dislike it. Were Monsieur de Trevières *my* own son, my only son, I should neither like nor dislike it. It is for France and for his Majesty: that is enough for me."

But it was not enough for Laurette de Chateaubriant—not though her father's release was to be accomplished by it. "But this plan means that the Comte will be sacrificed," she said hotly.

"Naturally," the Marquis said smoothly.

"Oh, Heavens!" the girl cried, white with fury, trembling with disgust.

"I have not allowed him even the chance of disclosing his real identity." Having told so much, de Clamorgan seemed bitterly determined to spare them nothing. "I have sewn into the lining of his cloak papers which will apparently prove him beyond question to be the real Chevalier."

"But," Laurette de Chateaubriant said hoarsely, "that means for him the guillotine! Oh!" she told her uncle furiously, "you might have spared your fingers the trouble of that fine needlework; Monsieur de Trevières will not deny that he is the Chevalier. It would not occur to him to do so! And—you—you asked him to dine with us!"

The old Marquis smiled at the girl, and at her young anger pityingly. He said nothing.

The old priest took her hands compassionately in his. "Of what consequence is the life of one man, my child," he said sadly and gravely, "when the triumph of our Cause is in question?"

Then Valentine de Grisolles spoke to her too, very, very kindly. "Would you not yourself, Laurette," she said, "give your life willingly for the King?"

"My own gladly," was the proud, prompt answer, "but not the life of another—and of one who had trusted me—deceive him to his death! Oh, it is too hideous. What kind of men are you?" she cried, breaking away from the kind old hands on hers, and standing apart, at bay, desperate, accusing them and judging.

"We are no longer men," her uncle said solemnly —"we are only instruments in the service of an ideal. Laurette, a day may come when we shall need you too. When it does, no consideration must influence you, neither friendship, love, nor paternal affection——"

"When that day comes you will find me ready," Laurette de Chateaubriant said simply.

"Then," her uncle told her tenderly, "try from to-night to begin your apprenticeship of stoicism."

She looked at him for a moment wildly, her eyes horror-wide, her mouth drawn and trembling, then she flung herself onto a chair, sobbing bitterly. "Oh, I can't, I can't!" she wept. "And I am certain if the real Chevalier were here, he would never allow another to die in his place."

"Unfortunately, my child, he is not here. I would to Heaven he were. But we must act without him." He spoke not unkindly. He was sorry for his little girl. And then he turned to Valentine. "Now, Madame," he said gravely, "it is time to deliver your letters."

"I will go at once," Valentine said cheerfully. "Good night, Laurette, and courage."

Laurette sprang up. "Madame," she cried imperiously, "you shall not!"

De Clamorgan put his hand on her shoulder and drew her back, gently, firmly—for she would have flung her young strength between the door and the Comtesse, who was at the desk, resealing the treacherous letters—the letters that meant a man's death —a man's betrayal—and he a Frenchman—of their race, their faith, their caste, their Cause.

The letters refastened, Madame de Grisolles went out quietly into the night. De Clamorgan closed the door behind her—and Laurette, released, sank dazed and tortured back onto her seat, and leaned despairingly against the counter.

"Now, my friends," the Marquis said, turning to Brochard and Raoul de Morlève, "to work. Go to bed, Laurette, my little one," he told her gently. "And do not be alarmed if you do not hear us come upstairs. Our work will occupy us all night."

De Morlève crossed to the trapdoor and opened it, and disappeared through it after the priest. But first they each threw a long look at the girl,

leaning against the counter—and the Abbé Brochard raised a thin hand and blessed her.

The uncle stood watching her a little while after the others had gone. He sighed. His heart was steeled—but not all hard.

"Good night, my child," he said—"good night and courage! Remember it is for your father!"

"Good night, my uncle," Laurette returned listlessly.

And the Marquis in his turn disappeared down the secret stairway, and the shelves swung back into their place.

Laurette sat on and on—alone, almost in the dark now, for her little lamp was burning low. She leaned against the counter still—buried in thought. "My poor father," her thoughts ran. "My poor father—and the Comte—oh, it is terrible—he was so brave and strong—and he said—he said that I had helped him!" She looked at the hand he had kissed. "Oh, if only I could find the *real* Chevalier!"

She stayed a long time there—thinking, suffering. But at last she picked up the lamp—it was almost out—and slipped up to her own room. She had no wish to see Madame la Comtesse de Grisolles when she returned. She wished that she need never see her again so long as they both lived.

The lamp went out while she was disrobing for the night—but she lit no other.

In her white nightgown she knelt down at her prie-dieu. She could not see the blue-clad figure

on its bracket on the wall, but she knew it was there and the sweetness of its smile. It was not much larger than Lucette's—but an artist had molded this, and tinted it. Laurette could just see the white gleam of the tiny, naked feet, flushed a little where the light of the little red lamp of oil caught them. "Hail, Mary! full of grace"—the girl began softly—and the old moon sent a shaft of ambient light in through the window, and it caught and kissed the bare feet of the kneeling girl.

CHAPTER XIV

"NOT LAUNCELOT—OR ANY OTHER!"

BUT in her lavender-sweet sheets at last, she could not sleep. She was very, very tired from the night's cruel strain—but she could not sleep—and even less could she rest.

At first her troubled thoughts were with Armand de Trevières, endangered through his own reckless generosity—doomed to perish because he had consented to attempt her father's rescue. She prayed for him again and again, lying in her cool white bed—ardently as she had prayed kneeling in the dark, before the Virgin she could not see.

But presently her thoughts turned, as they always did, to her hero—the unknown but loved Chevalier of the Purple Mask. For years now all her girlish

dreams had built themselves about this picturesque, romantic identity. She loved him. Girls often love so—exaggerating, of course, in their young unspoiled enthusiasm—exaggerating beyond all possibility of reality; but doing themselves less harm than at first thought might be feared; for they build up for themselves an ideal and a standard by which the man who comes to them with outstretched hand must be measured. "Kings they make gods, and meaner creatures kings." And unless through love of his lady the real king can rise to a something of godship, the meaner creature to something king-like, he runs good risk of being sent a-packing. The Chevalier of the Purple Mask, who had for two unbroken years stirred the imagination of Europe, and so teased and puzzled French Republicanism, darting in and out of France like a cruel gadfly, coming from whence no one knew, disappearing to where no one knew, a positive menace to the new democracy, an absolute hope now to the liegeman of the King, Laurette de Chateaubriant knew—in her heart, and her vivid musings—better than she knew any man of whom she had ever had sight or speech, better than any kinsman or her own director; and she loved him—this hero of myth and of rumor and of sweet girl-dreaming—better perhaps than she could ever love—in her years to come, the long years of life's immalleable realities—any man of real, ordinary flesh, wearing a real, ordinary coat, having ordinary traits and foibles, demanding real and extraordinary food: impatient perchance some-

times, careless of the little things now and then, honest, upright, but just short of perfection—lacking luster a little.

And often the girl-dream is somewhat hard on the real man.

Men do not often fall in love with unknown women, still less often with a maid of their own creation. And this difference in the two sexes is not a little to Mademoiselle's advantage. Nature is sadly partial—almost as unfairly so as mankind.

The Chevalier of the Purple Mask had his faults, no doubt, but he was no dreamer. His life was a riotous game of chess, a never-ending tournament of quick scheming and quicker actions—dart, seize, back to cover! His mother—a victim of revolutionary hatred, before the Terror broke—had given him her breast for the last time at the foot of the scaffold—and since that day of democratic achievement, he had known little of women—cared less. A few women he had known—after a fashion: to a "girl" he had never given a thought. He knew there were such things—necessary preliminaries, no doubt, as uncooked eggs and raw flour must precede a custard—but he considered them unpalatable, and silly, and gave them a very wide berth whenever a remembrance of their callow existence was forced upon him. And he had never heard of Mademoiselle Laurette Louise Thérèse Marie de Chateaubriant. And, alas! the chances are she would not have interested him, had they chanced to meet. His life was devoted (as his interest absorbed) to

pillage and blood-red frolic: frolic for himself, human pillage for the coffers of his King.

And Armand de Trevières—his personal history not altogether unlike that of Monsieur le Masque, and his tastes, too, somewhat similar—had dreamed of girls as little, built up a fair ideal, for his own worshiping in secret and from afar, as not-at-all.

But him Laurette had interested (little as it was to have been expected)—perhaps because her eyes were blue—perhaps because her hand was sweet and soft and shy—perhaps because her almost-worship of a man unknown to her, to him known to be rather so-so, and far more rough than diamond, tickled his fancy—perhaps because God had willed it so. And he was thinking of her—shyly—as he trudged out of Paris in the dawning (but not without his breakfast) and left the Capital as unsuspected and as unstayed as he had entered it the day before.

He laughed a little, as he went, to think that after all the years in which he'd known few women at all, and no nice ones, except one who held her court—her kingly uncle's court—in exile, and her attendant ladies, he should have found in one day a mistress and wife, if she and God would have it so, and, too, something very like a mother.

If she and God would have it so! Well, why not? His birth was as noble as hers. His fortunes were at low ebb, but was not she a pensioner on her uncle's cause-devoted purse? And he would carve out home and means for her. Of course he would, and of course he could: with his sword, with his

wits, in twenty ways. He would rescue her father —he would serve Louis always—these went without saying. This enterprise to which he was pledged should be accomplished to the full. But—after it —some of his time should be his own, some of its industry for Laurette. The good God! how he loved the child! And this time yesterday he had not known her, or of her existence! Oh! hum! truly it was a queer world, and he the queerest fellow in it; and then he laughed aloud, and he began to hum an old song—it was a way he had had for years to sing so when alone.

Yes—he was in love—with little, black-haired, blue-eyed, shy-eyed Laurette, no doubt about it—none.

And in a few moments he forgot all about her as completely as if he'd never known her, and fell to thinking deeply of the day before him and his night's work to come. He forgot Laurette. Other men have forgotten so—and as soon.

He had little fear that any of the arrangements he had entrusted to old Lucette would fall through or come tardy off. Cadonal had assured him that she was as efficient an instrument of their common work as she was inconspicuous. Because she was old, commonplace and altogether true to type—the peasant type that draws water for the thirsty farm cattle, carries bundles, half its own size, of faggots on its sturdy back, toils hard, lives rough, thinks little—she could execute safely and unsuspected much which no gentle person could, and much

that they—the gentlefolk—could but plot and plan darkly, in cellars, in peril.

He had small fear that he would not be met by the appointed relays of confederates at every point, aided at each necessity, as had been carefully prearranged. But, even so, one should always have substitute plans up one's sleeve or down one's buskin as Cadonal and the King had luckily (and most luckily for old Monsieur le Duc de Chateaubriant) had him himself in their reserve to substitute for Monsieur le Chevalier au Masque Violette, when that doughtier free-lance had either taken more than French leave (if only for a time) of them and of the Cause, or was needed (which he, Armand, took the liberty to doubt) for some enterprise even more perilous, more honorable and more important than this of abducting from the stronghold of that feared official's own Prefecture the great and powerful Orsanelli. And so he went his seeming careless way, determining carefully, shrewdly, what ruse to substitute if this ruse failed, what trick to play next if this trick were lost—went his way thinking, resolving—and forgetting Laurette quite.

And it was almost tit-for-tat there (which as a rule it isn't), for as he went Laurette stood at her open window drinking in the dawn, thinking not at all of Monsieur de Trevières, but of her father in his cell, and of the Chevalier of the Purple Mask, the unmet, but *not* unknown hero to whom she had given her heart—her first fresh love, and to whom she pinned her faith and her hope.

Laurette was in her pretty nightdress still, her hair a cloud of dusk upon the cambric's white, and the rose light of early day kissing her little bare feet as the moonlight had last night.

And as she turned away from the window, and knelt again—where she had knelt last night, Armand de Trevières was singing a gay chanson the old troubadours had sung, and munched a handful of early cherries as he sang and thought, with a frown on his forehead, a laugh in his eyes, of plots and counterplots. And he had quite forgotten Laurette.

And what of it? A fellow can be in love without being up to his neck in it all the time. Girls are nice. Some girls are very nice. But there are other things in life. He was his own man, yet awhile, let us hope—his own and the King's; always the King's! He had forgotten Laurette. But he would think of her again.

The Laurettes of this world—little, winsome, French—are not forgotten long. Their image recurs. And *they* rarely abdicate.

CHAPTER XV

"SCREW YOUR COURAGE TO THE STICKING PLACE"

MONSIEUR LE CAPITAINE LAVERNAIS was not in a good humor as he washed his handsome hands for supper on Wednesday evening, May 12th, in a charming bedroom in the Prefecture of Evreux.

He was a sweet-tempered man, a sunny soul, the mirth-in-chief, and peacemaker-in-ordinary to his entire regiment. But he was curdled now, all his customary good-nature bittered to gall, soured to vinegar. He had spent eight long hours in repugnant attendance on Orsanelli—confided impressively to his care by Fouché himself after an early and none too comfortable déjeuner, more à la fourchette than to Captain Lavernais's taste. But it was not the rough quality of Fouché's menu that had blistered a temper usually the smoothest in the French army, but the rasping association with Monsieur Orsanelli—and indeed that functionary was accurately calculated to curdle the very milk of human kindness itself.

It had been an awful day—and Eugène Marie Paul Joseph Lavernais was dreading supper rebelliously. He damned the soap, he shook the ewer, and he beat the basin with the towel. Orsanelli was a bear, a toad, and a reptile, and he, Eugène Marie, the most ill-used officer in Europe.

"Nom de Dieu! What a day!" he said to the mirror ruefully. But his anger was passing a little. The mirror had soothed him. A mirror always did. And why not? He was every inch a man—this—and every hair a soldier. Bonaparte had no better. And he was none the worse a man, and considerably the better a soldier, for taking a hearty, wholesome interest in his own good looks.

And frankly the day had not been comfortable. Orsanelli had grumbled, or when he had not grumbled he had whined. When he had not whined he had boasted. He had bullied, meddled with what should have been left to Lavernais's own quiet efficiency—and at least a dozen times he had shown quaking fright, and generally conducted himself socially as some vain, surly, incompetent actor, unwillingly playing a part he disliked and playing it badly. He drank enough, he smoked too much—the vile new peasant habit—and he ate—but there, Mon Dieu! his eating was indescribable—a great coarse oaf of a man with the manners of a pig. And there was a girl in Paris—a girl of the people, perhaps, but Lavernais doubted it slyly and, if it were so, was ardently minded to mend it—a girl with big blue eyes, an enchanting dimple, a teasing tongue, and yards and yards of gold braid that he, Lavernais, might be buying from her at this moment, watching her measure it off, letting it ripple through the whitest little hands in Paris. He had seen Joséphine's often, and the girl at Majolin's hands were lovelier, rosier tipped, more exquisitely pink

and filbert nailed—and he might be watching them now—touching them, perhaps. He had managed it twice now in the six months he'd known her—but for the cursed fate that had sent him to this odious hole to bear-lead and cuddle a fat-headed, unwashed devil.

Captain Lavernais had left the mirror, and he was in a very black and evil temper again. But the clock showed it within an ace of supper, and with a shrug—which expressed what an Englishman suffering the self-same emotion would have expressed by half grumbling, "Oh—well—here goes" —Captain Eugène Marie Paul Joseph clanked out of the room, down the stairs and in to supper.

Oh, that supper!

The dainty Captain of Hussars will never forget it—never, never!

What Citizen Orsanelli left undone that he might have done to upset appetites and discourage digestion it would be difficult to imagine. He wiped his mouth on the table-cloth, he gargled his wine, he smoked from caviare to pêche glacée, and shook out his ashes all over the table. He did other things less easy of nice description—and he so offended the gorge of Eugène Lavernais that that staunch soldier of Napoleon almost turned Royalist on the spot.

And though they supped early—bourgeoisly early, Lavernais called it (too early for dinner, hours too early for supper)—they also supped extraordinarily late, for Citizen Orsanelli went on supping—on and on *ad libitum*.

It was eleven o'clock before the bored and angry captain could lure the great man to the drawing-room and coffee. The simple servants of this somewhat countrified establishment were not used to such hours—but in spite of that no one could well be sleepy here to-night. The old place teemed with excitement, trembled with agitation. For the word had gone forth, whispered to two or three in confidence by Madame Anais, the housekeeper, bellowed to all earth and the heavens by Orsanelli himself, that that outrageous but splendid fellow—outlaw and dare-devil—the Purple Mask had vowed to kidnap the great Citizen Prefect at midnight—this very midnight—and from the safe shelter of the fortified and guarded walls of his own Prefecture. It was enough to keep any household of servants awake—and most of them women, as here! A few of the soldiers yawned—but then they were used to horrors and hairbreadth escapes (and non-escapes), supped off them nightly, lived with them—yes, and by them—always.

The soldiers yawned—but not so Orsanelli. Orsanelli, blustering, pompous, vain, was scared little short of death. Lavernais saw that plainly. Like a good many men of his type—the worser police type—he was a lion in another's danger, a cur in his own.

He slouched down heavily—in a chair framed of twisted gilt, upholstered in creamy satin hand-embroidered with loves and roses and pale blue ribbon festoons, and looked about him nervously—

a tall, uncouth man, wearing a badly-fitting uniform —the uniform of his office, a long claret-colored coat, the big tricolored sash and all. He had ugly hair, an ugly face and odious side-whiskers. The hair was red trying to turn gray and making a sorry speckled spectacle of itself in the process; the face was red—unnaturally so—and the whiskers were crimson brush. One eyebrow was just a shade higher and heavier than its mate, and the pair had a comical effect of being ashamed to be seen where they were. The man looked surly and ungracious generally. He spoke with a rough Corsican accent, he still sucked doggedly on the long clay stem of his church-warden, and he oozed extreme irritation and extreme fear mingled, from every pore—and he was all pores.

Madame Anais, busy at a side table, curtseyed respectfully as they entered, and Lavernais nodded an acknowledgment. Orsanelli gave no acknowledgment, unless the evil look he threw about the room could count as such.

A man-servant stood beside the table where he had placed the Benedictine and the glasses—and the big room was radiant from the light of twenty candles. The blazon had been commanded. If Citizen Orsanelli had to be kidnaped, he did not propose to be kidnaped in the dark.

"What is the matter with Citizen Orsanelli?" Bernard, who had waited at dinner, had asked Madame Anais when he had gone to her for orders about coffee and liqueur. "He seems very nervous."

"The Royalists," she had replied, almost as if she liked the word. "He's been sent here to capture some of them—all in this district—and it is said—and he has heard it—that the Purple Mask has sworn to capture him."

"What! In this house?" Bernard had stammered, almost as nervous as the Prefect Orsanelli.

Madame had replied with a scornful laugh, and a nod—"Rubbish" was the only word she had troubled to employ.

"Well, that was an excellent supper," Lavernais said, seating himself at some distance from the fumigating giant in the delicate chair—and more lightly than that official had done. And he forbore to add how much more he should have enjoyed the satisfactory meal in other company—or in none.

"I would have enjoyed it better," Orsanelli grumbled, "if my mind were more at rest. You explored the park?" he demanded with a rude peremptoriness that was partly nervousness and altogether his nature.

"Every corner of it, Citizen Prefect," Lavernais told him good-humoredly—really he could not sulk, even with this boor, any longer—and especially after such an admirable meal. "My men have beaten the thickets, and searched every clump of trees."

"Is the park large?" the Prefect asked querulously.

"You will judge how large," the soldier said,

"when I tell you that it took nearly three hours to search it thoroughly."

"What a damned stupid idea to place the Prefecture at the gates of the town, so completely isolated from other houses," the Prefect growled on unhappily.

"My dear Orsanelli," Lavernais laughed at him almost openly, "high walls surround the grounds on every side. You couldn't be safer in the midst of Evreux itself."

"You searched the lofts and garrets?"

"Every one of them," the Captain assured him solemnly.

"And the cellars?"

"Just as thoroughly. I had every barrel moved. I am positive there is no one concealed in the house," Lavernais said patiently. Almost he was sorry for the great unwashed baby. It must be terrible to be such a coward, a suffering in itself—and inflicted with it a fearful suffering of shame, or so the soldier thought.

"We'll take no chances to-night, Captain," Orsanelli said emphatically.

"Certainly not," the other rejoined as earnestly. "You are guarded by a detachment of my hussars, strengthened by a large number of gendarmes whom I have brought in from the surrounding district."

"Let's hope it will be sufficient," the nervous one said grudgingly—surly and not yet satisfied.

Eugène Lavernais was growing almost impatient—and he was desperately bored—had been from

the first. "I can assure you," he began, and there were a new tinge of self-assertion in his pleasant voice, "I have taken every possible precaution." He got up and went to the door and opened it, Orsanelli watching him almost suspiciously.

"Brigadier!" the Captain called, and added, "Send Lieutenant Roche to me," when a hussar appeared in the doorway. "Roche is my Lieutenant," he told Orsanelli, closing the door on the hussar, "an old soldier who has served in three campaigns. It is he who commands all the gendarmes."

The great one heaved a mighty sigh of relief—almost a sigh of satisfaction. "You seem to have neglected nothing," he said to Lavernais, and his tone was almost civil.

"Bonaparte has entrusted me with the guarding of the Prefect of the Eure," Napoleon's Captain said, not without dignity. "I am determined to show him that I can accomplish the task without the aid of the Citizen Fouché."

Orsanelli gave a vicious grunt. Something in the mention of Fouché's name, or in the hussar's way of speaking it, had annoyed him greatly. He smoked on moodily for a time. But presently he said, surlily, "A propos of Fouché, how is it that his agent, Brisquet, has not arrived?"

Lavernais shook his head. "I cannot understand that," he said, "but you need have no anxiety. You are absolutely safe here. I defy the Purple Mask to get near you—far less kidnap you—whilst you are guarded by my soldiers."

"Brave words, Captain," Orsanelli told him, "but it's a damned unpleasant business for all that!"

CHAPTER XVI

BRAVE PRECAUTIONS

WHEN a Frenchman is fat he is very fat indeed. He does the plump business with a thoroughness that puts any mere German fat man to thin shame. Lieutenant Roche was extremely fat. And also he was very tall. He looked down upon his officer from a far-off height as he stood at clanking salute in the doorway, a fire-eater, if ever France and the good god Mars made one: red-faced, huge red eyebrows; and the plaits of hair on either side of his face, compulsorily a part of his splendid —and absurd—uniform, snow-white, of course, made the uniform red of face and hair blaze doubly crimson. His long sword clashed and clattered even as he breathed; when he walked or distinctly moved, its noise increased to cannonade: in brief, a mighty warrior, mightily arrayed.

But for all his height—and width—for all his plumes and gold, it was impossible not to see which of the two hussars was master, which was man. And a blind man, who had a soul of hearing in his ear, could not have failed to see that old Lieutenant Roche adored his young superior officer.

"You sent for me, my Captain?" he said caressingly, in a fat, hoarse voice that was as fierce as his moustachios, and as absurd as his false white hair plaits and ornate uniform.

(It would be interesting to know how it came about that the bravest, and the most long-suffering, army Europe had ever known was bedizened in the trappings of opera bouffe or of traveling mountebanks. The psychology behind it would be worth unraveling.)

Lavernais nodded. "Roche, have you executed my orders?"

The faithful Roche was hurt—both in his love and in his dignity. He neglect or slight any order of Lavernais! He fail in a military duty!

"In detail," he replied tartly. Then he relented. If "mon Capitaine" wished to hear him talk about the items of his scrupulous execution of his duty, talked it should be. "My hussars are all with me," he boomed on, "and I have stationed gendarmes at short intervals all round the walls of the estate."

"Keep them under arms all night," Orsanelli exclaimed quickly.

Roche scanned the Prefect with a scornful disregard that would have been insolent had it not been the not mean outcome of that soldier's esprit de corps that made an order from any but one's own officer an intolerable offense, and under no circumstances to be condoned, much less obeyed. Then he turned his head and eyes to his captain.

Lavernais nodded gravely. But Roche saw the twinkle in his eyes. "That's quite right, Lieutenant," he said, "and let your hussars keep their horses saddled in case a pursuit shall be necessary."

"It shall be done, my Captain." He turned to go.

But Orsanelli, the lion-hearted, was not nearly done with him. "How many men have you, Lieutenant?" he demanded anxiously.

"Eighty gendarmes and thirty hussars."

"Eighty gendarmes!" Orsanelli put down his pipe to rub his hands. Almost he breathed again.

"I collected them from all the surrounding districts, from Damville, from Beaumont and from Vernon," Roche continued a little contemptuously and yet with pride. The contempt was for the Citizen Prefect's evident panic. The pride was for his captain's ear—a pride in his own indefatigable industry and the lavishness of its results.

"Do you know that the park wall has a gap in it?" Lavernais asked him, taking a plan of the estate up from the table, and holding it out to Roche, "near the brook?—just here!"

"I have already noticed that." Of course he had! "It is guarded by four gendarmes, two from Conches and two from Damville."

"The estate has two entrances, I believe," the Prefect joined in nervously.

Lieutenant Roche shrugged his shoulders. He had to. It is not a subservient motion, nor particularly a soldierly one. It smacks of Gallic esprit

rather than of military discipline—and, be the occasion what it may, it seems somehow inappropriate to a uniform. But French soldiers have always shrugged as incurably as they have posed, and fought to the death. They did it then. They do it now. A Frenchman must shrug—or explode. Undoubtedly it is best, for sundry reasons, and nicer, that he should not—explode.

But having used his tiny, harmless safety-valve, Roche answered civilly enough, "It has, Citizen Prefect. Each is guarded by a squadron of hussars."

"Should any person during the night," the terrified official pestered on pompously, "attempt to pass through the cordon and enter the park or leave it, for the matter of that, let him be brought to me immediately!"

"I will give orders, Citizen Prefect," Roche said briefly.

And, before Orsanelli could conjure up any further precaution to enjoin, or question to spring, Lavernais said, "Thank you, Roche. That's all. I hardly think," he added to Orsanelli, as the hussar saluted and went out, "that the Chevalier will effect an entrance into the Prefecture to-night."

"Unless," the Prefect returned unhappily, "he is already inside."

"But how is that possible?" Captain Lavernais expostulated, half amused, half impatient.

"Perfectly under a disguise," the valiant one said stoutly.

Eugène Lavernais grinned merrily. "But not very probable," he laughed.

And so the night wore on. Lavernais was growing sleepy. He refilled his coffee cup more than once. And Citizen Orsanelli, jumpy from the first, grew increasingly so. He promised to be very jumpy indeed by the time that midnight struck the hour when graves do yawn and empurpled chevaliers prowl and pounce on poor, ill-protected prey.

A servant who brought in the tray of steaming, fragrant coffee he had not seen before, and he greeted him with an exclamation of distrust and apprehension that very nearly caused the old serving-man to drop his silver salver, pot, porcelain cups, cream and all. And a nice mess that would have made on the best Prefectorate carpet! The housekeeper had to be summoned, and she was obliged to all but take her oath that Germain—a childish, shaky old fellow—was neither a spy and assassin nor, still worse, the Purple Mask himself, but a trustworthy servant, known to her for years, and of the most impeccable Republican adherence, that the Citizen Prefect had not seen him at supper because he had not waited at that meal, that he had not waited then because he had only now come on duty —and a great deal more to the same reassuring effect.

Orsanelli was relieved—but only half convinced. And when Bernard, another domestic, a little frightened rat of a man, who was afraid of the turkeys in the barnyard, and hid in the cellar when

it thundered and lightened, came in to replenish the fire, the Citizen Orsanelli jumped so high and exclaimed in such distress that Bernard screamed and jumped in sympathy and dropped his armful of logs and cones thump—not only at, but also on, the Prefect's feet. Then there was trouble—trouble for Citizen Bernard, and Lavernais gave it up, and rolled in his chair with wicked mirth. And when the Prefect demanded Lorraine brandy and a tumbler—instead of "trashy liqueur and a wench's thimble to drink the stuff out of"—Bernard refused flatly to go to the cellar for the desired cognac, and so did Germain when rung for, and Madame Anais had to get it herself. (And she did it under military escort.) And the Prefect rated the two old servitors roundly for their unmanly cowardice. *They* had nothing to fear while *he* was here—and Captain Lavernais.

Sabine, the housekeeper's pretty niece, came in indignantly to demand a pass. She lived with her parents a half stone's throw from the gates, and in going home had been blocked by the soldiers and told she could not leave the estate without the order of Captain Lavernais. She got her pass, but after an ado and a cross-examination from Orsanelli the Cautious which would have been more commensurate with the releasing by a Russian Head of Police of some very heinous Nihilist.

And these were but a few of the alarums. Lavernais the volatile woke up, and began quite to enjoy himself.

"Is the Citizen Prefect going to sit up all night?" Madame Anais ventured solicitously, when she curtseyed her own good-night.

"I shall wait till midnight," the Prefect told her grandiloquently—adding ironically—"for the visit of the Purple Mask."

Madame Anais threw up her hands in alarm, half mock, half real. "The good God protect us!" she said as she left them.

"I will watch with you, Citizen Prefect," Lavernais said banteringly. "If an attempt should be made, I should like to be the first——"

"Take me to the Citizen Prefect!" a young voice cried shrilly in the corridor, and Roche's gruff voice answered it gruffly, "What do you want with him?"

"I must speak to the Citizen Prefect! Take me to him at once. I tell you I will, at once, at once!" And the door burst open and fat Roche and slim Sabine burst in pell-mell, struggling together so excitedly that it was difficult to tell which was lieutenant, which damsel, and quite impossible to tell which was getting the better of the fray.

Lavernais grinned—to see how gently, in spite of his ferocious face, big Roche was dealing with the panting slip of a girl. And Roche caught his officer's eye, and grinned too, like a big red sheep, and fell a-mopping his cheek. Sabine had scratched him, and the vixen's pretty pink nails were sharp. But one hand, even such a huge, strong one as his, was not enough to hold such a twisting, writhing handful; and Sabine tore herself away at last, and

threw herself on Orsanelli, almost into his arms, sobbing, "Oh, Citizen Prefect! Citizen Prefect! I—I—I have just seen the Purple Mask!"

CHAPTER XVII

"NAME OF THE DEVIL!"

AND the girl was right—or very nearly right—for she *had* seen the Comte de Trevières, cloaked, purple-masked, substitute and decoy-duck for the famous Chevalier of the Mask. She had seen him just beyond that gap in the old château wall—and that was not all she'd done, far from all. She had seen him, and she had been seen by him, and what is more, he had kissed her.

But he had done it lightly, all in the night's work, and then, as was his way, he had turned the chance contretemps to his own benefit. For it was Armand himself who had sent her scurrying back to sound the shrill alarm of his approach—Armand de Trevières himself, and not her devotion to the doughty Orsanelli.

But at first they scarcely believed her.

"What!" they all cried, and Orsanelli crossed himself hurriedly. "When? Where?" he spluttered.

"I had just left the road and entered the short cut that runs along by the little wood, when sud-

denly he appeared in the full light of the moon," she began breathlessly, jumbling her words so in her excitement that they clattered against her teeth like castanets.

Orsanelli began to tremble at the picture she had drawn. Lavernais thought the girl was talking moonshine, that she had gone midsummer mad from all the hue and cry and gossip-buzz of knight-errant highwaymen, abductions, long cloaks and purple masks. And he felt a trifle impatient at this new eruption. There'd be rumpus enough for one night. Roche wondered whether the girl had seen a ghost, or was point-blank lying—the latter probably, women like to add fuel to every fire.

"He was masked, and covered with a long cloak, just like they say he always is," she continued dramatically. "I was so frightened that I trembled —oh, messieurs—I mean, citizens—I trembled in every limb—but he came up to me, and he spoke in quite a soft voice, such a nice voice too"—she sighed at the memory—" 'Don't be afraid,' he said, oh! so kindly, 'don't be afraid, Mademoiselle! No one is going to hurt you. But you must take this letter at once to the Prefect.'" And that was what the masked man had said—but he had put it a little differently. Sabine felt that it might be inadvisable to repeat his words with servile exactitude.

"A letter!" Orsanelli screamed. "Why the devil didn't you say so before?"

And Lavernais too pricked up his ears. Was

there something more than vanity at the worst, or at the best hysterics, in the girl's tale, after all?

"He wanted to give me money, but I refused"—Sabine said virtuously—"and—so—instead he—he gave me a kiss——" She ended in an ecstatic whisper, and rounded that off with a girlish giggle.

"Damned scoundrel!" Lieutenant Roche broke out—and then went plum-color—redder than he was he could not go: it wasn't to be done.

Lavernais laughed—a soft, pleasant chuckle.

"Oh, it didn't hurt," the girl said ingenuously. "He was very gentle," she added—and then she sighed again. Orsanelli grunted with disgust. "And —and—he raised his mask"—they were all attention now—"and he did it so gallantly"—and she clasped her little brown hands together in gratification—"just like a cavalier raising his hat to a real lady—and—and——"

"You saw him—his face?" Lavernais said decidedly. "Describe him."

"Oh—yes!" Sabine said, "I saw him. He is young and very, very beautiful."

But beyond this she could not tell. He was very, very beautiful. But neither Orsanelli's threats nor Lavernais's deft suavity could elicit from the girl any more useful description of a face for the photograph of which Fouché—yes, and Bonaparte too—would have given lavish reward.

"Oh! well, never mind about that," the Prefect said testily at last, "where is the letter?"

"It is here——" she began, drawing it from her dress.

Orsanelli snatched it from her with a snarl; and she fell back a little with an indignant lift of one slim shoulder.

The Prefect floundered back into his long-suffering armchair and fumbled at the seal. Lavernais came and stood looking eagerly over his shoulder.

Roche caught Sabine's roving eye and pointed reproachfully at his lacerated cheek. She tossed her head and smiled at him—and the big fellow smiled back.

"Signed 'The Purple Mask,'" Orsanelli cried.

"Well, of all the audacious scoundrels!" the Captain of Hussars said—after an expressive whistle—when he had read—over the other's shoulder—"What a childish piece of braggadocio!" he added with an amused shrug.

But the Citizen Orsanelli looked very grave.

The letter they had read ran:—

> "Monsieur le Prefect, Will you be so kind as to prepare for me the sum of 10,000 livres? I will call for it before midnight. If you refuse to give me this sum, I shall, to my regret, be compelled to kidnap you.
>
> "THE PURPLE MASK."

"Whether it is braggadocio or not remains to be seen," Orsanelli said nervously. "You see, he is already here, prowling around me like a tiger round its prey."

"Let him prowl," Lavernais retorted promptly. "He will never risk entering the house—and he

couldn't get in, if he were fool enough to try. We'd have him then."

"Oh, indeed, Monsieur le Capitaine, he will try, indeed he will," Sabine broke in, "I am sure of it."

"Eh?" the Prefect gasped. "You think so?"

"I am positive he will."

"I challenge him to do so," Captain Lavernais said contemptuously. "He will have to force his way through eighty gendarmes and thirty hussars."

"Hm!" Orsanelli was a little relieved at those respectable round numbers. One hundred and ten to one seemed reassuring odds. "Well, one would think that ought to be enough."

"You can go now," Lavernais told Sabine pleasantly. "And many thanks. Lieutenant, you will station at each of these two doors three hussars and a brigadier, and as many under the window."

"It shall be done, my Captain."

"Select from your troop soldiers on whom you can rely."

Roche saluted, and followed—with great dignity—Sabine from the room.

"That, I hope, will remove your anxiety?"

"Oh, of course, of course!" Orsanelli said as unconcernedly as he could contrive. He was sitting hunched over Purple Mask's letter. Except to look about the room with furtive terror every few minutes, he had scarcely lifted his eyes from it since he broke the seal.

"There is no other way into this room but by the window and those two doors," Lavernais went on.

"Unless the Chevalier descends from heaven, or ascends from the other place, I don't quite see how he is going to get into this room."

"Oh, quite so! quite so!" the Prefect said testily. "But," he added with a sudden quaver which the good-hearted soldier found really pathetic—"but he is so very wonderful—so—so adroit—is he not?" And then Orsanelli fell to studying the letter fretfully again.

The steps of marching men came along the corridor.

"Here come my sentinels," Lavernais announced.

And sure enough. Roche, from without, opened one door, and three hussars were posted as sentinels on its very threshold.

"Brigadier Maillard!" Lavernais commanded.

"My Captain!" the brigadier said, saluting and stepping smartly to his officer.

"Keep a strict watch that no one enters here without orders," his captain told him.

"I will see to it, my Captain," came the confident reply.

Steps—just the same precise military steps—came outside the other door; Roche came in and threw it open, and the brisk little ceremony was gone through again.

"That's settled then. Now let us make ourselves comfortable," Lavernais said, lazily lounging back in an easy-chair.

The clock struck the half-hour, and Orsanelli's face twitched.

Then a scuffle sounded from the far end of the corridor. A woman screamed, and then giggled—and a sentry outside the door was heard to titter in a most unsoldierly way.

The Prefect jumped.

"Come, come, Citizen Prefect," Lavernais said, laughing indolently. "Mademoiselle Sabine has been kissed again—twice within an hour! It's an industrious minx! And it was my own red Roche this time, I'll wager you three livres against one centime."

Orsanelli did not close with the bet—which was just as well for him, and one centime the better.

"This old brandy looks excellent," and when Lavernais had poured and handed a generous dram, he helped himself to a scantier drink, and lifted his glass, saying merrily, "And so to the devil with the Chevalier of the Purple Mask! He has become an obsession, a bogey to frighten the simple country folk. It is too ridiculous—contemptible even. But with men of affairs—sensible men of affairs—such as you and I, Citizen——"

Captain Lavernais never finished that flattering sentence.

Two shots rang through the distance.

Orsanelli could not have jumped higher nor quicker if one of them had caught and lifted him.

"Name of the devil! What was that?" he cried.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SERVANT OF THE KING

"THEY are firing! They are shooting! There is trouble!" the Prefect cried, almost incoherent with excitement.

"Evidently," Lavernais said shortly. It was all very well to soothe and buttress this frightened giant of fear when there was nothing better to do, and he—Lavernais—was as good-natured a man as the next. But the blood in his soldier veins leapt to the sound of the guns as at music, and he had no mind to stop here philandering with the uniformed old woman entrenched behind the big chair.

"Wait here," he told Orsanelli peremptorily. But he had little apprehension that that brave would insist upon accompanying him to the forefront of the scene of battle; and there was nothing he desired less. "Wait here. I will see what it is."

And he started to go. But Citizen Orsanelli caught him by the arm. "No, no! Don't leave me alone," the Prefect insisted.

Lavernais did not hesitate an instant. He was taking orders from no one now. He was going to give them. This was his act—and the stage was waiting for him. The first shot had been his cue, the second the voice of the prompter. He threw Orsanelli off with an oath, and ran to the door. But before he could reach it, from a hubbub and

mêlée growing louder, coming nearer, Lieutenant Roche broke in unceremoniously.

"My Captain, my Captain," he cried, saluting jubilantly, "we've got him! We've got him!"

"The Chevalier?" Orsanelli panted.

"Himself," Roche said elatedly. "He tried to enter by the gap in the wall. The gendarmes rushed on him. Seeing himself surrounded, he surrendered. It was four to one, but, even so, he didn't put up a magnificent fight."

"Bravo! Lieutenant, Bravo!" The Prefect was enchanted, and he made to embrace the red Roche —but that slippery fish side-stepped, saying, "They have handcuffed him, and are bringing him here."

"Victory!" Orsanelli screamed, almost dancing. "We have captured the Purple Mask! We have captured the Purple Mask! I must at once inform Bonaparte of the important news," and he strutted across to the desk where writing materials were.

"Get your horse saddled, Lieutenant," Lavernais told Roche, "you yourself must carry the news of this important capture to Paris."

"With joy, my Captain," replied the gratified hussar, hurrying away as he saluted.

But matched with Citizen Orsanelli's, all honest Roche's gratification was "as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine." The elated Prefect stayed the inditing of his important communiqué for the nonce, and coming round the desk seized Lavernais's hand in an ardent grip—hearty as a Mason's, or a lion's. "All my congratulations, my

dear Lavernais," he said with emotion. "Thanks to our united courage and determination the Chevalier has fallen into our hands. I shall draw up for General Bonaparte a very flattering report of your services."

Lavernais appeared much moved. And he was. He made a very pretty bow, and he said, "I am greatly obliged, Citizen Prefect."

"It is a pleasure, I assure you," Orsanelli said pompously, "to commend merit, and to me personally, especially satisfactory to praise courage. There is no other quality I rate so high." Then he busied himself fussily with his important report. But he had not been writing long when the great moment came—probably the greatest moment the Citizen had ever known or ever would—for steps came again, steps and a hum of voices, and Roche, trying to speak as if such captures came to his bow and spear every day—and failing—came through the door and announced, "Here he is, my Captain," and the famous Purple Mask stood before them!

At least they believed it to be the Purple Mask.

And it *was* Armand le Comte de Trevières, handcuffed, between two gendarmes. And he wore a purple mask, was enveloped in a long dark cloak, such as the brigands always wear—and the villain often—in any well-conducted opera—grande or comique.

Behind him, electrified with curiosity—and one of them with a tender emotion—crowded Madame Anais, Bernard, Sabine, Germain and every other

creature of the place: a motley throng, some shivering, some highly pleased, some puffed out with their own importance in being associated—vicariously, but what's the odds of that?—with the crowning triumph of this night of prowess, some few beside Sabine sympathetic, and one and all bursting with excitement and curiosity.

It was a mighty moment.

Orsanelli the Prefect felt it mightily.

He rose to it magnificently. "Ah," he said with superb irony, "ah! So this is the famous Chevalier of the Purple Mask!"

The cloaked and manacled figure swept him a profound bow. Orsanelli had meant to mock his foe. De Travières did mock.

"Are you the gendarmes that arrested him?" When Gabriel blows his trump, he will not do it more magnificently than Orsanelli the Citizen Prefect asked that seemingly simple question. It was oratory and self-importance in full flower.

"Yes, Citizen Prefect," a gendarme told him.

"Very good," Orsanelli replied grandly. "You will not be forgotten, my good fellows."

"Take off his mask," Lavernais ordered.

The gendarme saluted. "I told him to take it off, sir. But he refused."

"Take off your mask, or we will force you to!" Orsanelli thundered at Armand.

"You can save yourself that trouble, Citizen Prefect," the prisoner retorted gently, with a soft, friendly laugh. "Your gendarmes seem to have

overlooked the fact that I am manacled. If you make it possible for me to do so, I will unmask with pleasure."

"Set him free," Lavernais commanded.

It took but a moment, and then, with another bow to Citizen Orsanelli, Armand unmasked.

"Oh's"—"Ah's"—and other quick syllables of feminine French exclamation pricked the air admiringly as the light of the Prefect's many candles fell on Armand de Trevières's careless, debonair face. He smiled, and more than one of the women smiled back at him. And Eugène Lavernais's lips twitched when their eyes met. In spite of himself he liked the fellow, and in spite of the hussar's Republicanism, the Comte liked him: each of them knew a man when he had the luck to see one.

"How young he is!" Madame Anais whispered to Germain. She did not add, with her tongue, "to die" but her heart added it; and she was sorry.

"A fine young fellow," old Germain said admiringly.

"He looks strong as a tiger," commented Bernard.

Sabine said nothing, but her eyes were eloquent.

Roche and Brigadier Maillard held the little throng sternly at bay—but it surged about the background of the room, trying from every angle to get a fair sight of the face of the famous Purple Mask.

The Citizen Orsanelli had not smiled at the full view of the man's uncovered face. And he was far

from smiling now, when he called, and beckoned, "Mademoiselle Sabine!"

"Citizen Prefect?" she said nervously, stepping towards him timidly.

"Do you recognize this fellow as the man who a short time ago entrusted you with a letter for me?"

Sabine looked at the Chevalier hesitatingly—perturbed. "Well," she stammered unhappily, "I would not like—that is, I could not be su——"

Armand broke in. "You needn't be afraid, Mademoiselle. Tell them exactly what happened." And his eyes met hers very kindly.

"Yes," the girl said—blushing a little, and not unbecomingly—"it is he"—and unconsciously she put one little hand shyly to her cheek.

"Good!" the Prefect said pompously. "So," he turned to Armand, "you are the notorious Chevalier of the Purple Mask?"

"I have no wish to deny it," was the careless reply.

Orsanelli made a note of this important and damaging admission.

"Your profession?" the inquisitor proceeded.

Armand de Trevières drew himself up to his proud height. His eyes flashed. And his voice rang joyfully through the room, replying, "A servant of his Majesty the King!"

CHAPTER XIX

AN OUTLAW'S WORD OF HONOR

IT was a brave thing to say—there and thus. It was a splendid assertion of loyalty to Louis XVIII, and as splendid a proclamation of contempt of the man Orsanelli, and of all he represented. It was a magnificent challenge, flung in the face of fearful odds.

In it the Captain of Hussars took his prisoner's measure finally, and admiration and respect kindled in the eyes he turned gravely upon the imperious, lithe, gray-clad figure standing haughty and imperturbable with an ample old purple cloak heaped at his feet, and his purple mask dangling in his hand.

Eugène Lavernais worshiped Napoleon Bonaparte, and would while he lived. But from that moment this irreconcilable Royalist, dangerous—taunting too, was established firmly in his cordial liking. And Sabine had turned Royalist on the spot.

Indeed Orsanelli was the only one there who did not in some kind way respond to the boldness and the devotion to a cause out at heels of the man they had outnumbered, outfought, captured, but whom they had not conquered—and, as every soldierly soldier there instinctively knew, whom they could not conquer.

Orsanelli was furious. This vagabond, this tatterdemalion of knight-errantry, despoiled the

Prefect of half his triumph, since he, the so-called Chevalier, would not be humiliated. A cringing prisoner might have won some scant kindliness, some cheap consideration, from the Prefect, but a prisoner rampant and unafraid was an offense, a goad and a rank stench in the sensitive nostril of the Orsanelli.

"A servant of the Bourbon—the banished Citizen Capet," he snarled. "Why not say at once, conspirator and traitor to the Republic of France?"

"As to that, Citizen Prefect, please yourself," Armand said cheerfully. "Certainly I conspire against the 'Republic' of France, and shall with all my might and all my force, until it, or I, expire."

"You confess that you attempted to force an entrance here?" The great report to the great Bonaparte must be completed, and the accused must be interrogated in the most accredited policeman formula.

"I confess it," de Trevières laughed, and that made the confession several times more heinous.

"Anyhow, you have failed in your project to kidnap the Prefect," Lavernais said with a laugh. The success of which same plan he could have applauded heartily, had the staunchness of his Republicanism permitted.

"Ah!" Armand de Trevières returned with a courtesy that was almost deferential, and that was entirely sincere, "there, I am afraid, you are mistaken. At midnight he will be in my power."

If his desire had been to cause a sensation, he

had succeeded. The room buzzed. And Orsanelli looked ridiculously uncomfortable.

Captain Lavernais glanced at the clock. "You have less than twenty minutes," he said with not unfriendly irony.

"More than sufficient time," the Chevalier said.

"We will see about that!" snapped Orsanelli. "At present you are my prisoner."

Armand made him a low bow. "Whilst waiting till you become mine," he said.

One of the servants tittered; a woman, of course.

"Enough of this foolery," the Prefect exclaimed violently. "Gendarmes, you will handcuff this man again, and take him to the prison at Evreux!"

Armand held out his hands good-naturedly. He even had the impudence to smile as he did it, and as the heavy bracelets clicked. But when the soldiers were about to move him off he intervened pleasantly.

"Just a moment," he said gently. "I have an important communication to make to the Perfect."

"I am all attention," Orsanelli said brutally.

"Oh!" the Chevalier said almost caressingly, "it is of a very private nature, and must be made to you alone."

"How!" cried the brave one, backing precipitately in the direction of the young captain. "You want to——"

"I formally refuse, Citizen Prefect," Lavernais broke in quickly, "to have you alone with this man."

"What!" Armand de Trevières exclaimed with a sunny smile, "even with my hands in irons?"

"Even in that condition," Eugène Lavernais told him firmly.

"You flatter me, Monsieur," de Trevières said with a laugh. "Well—then—it's impossible for me to speak." He turned to his guards. "Take me to prison!" he bade them, with a rollicking gesture of mock heroics.

"Gendarmes!" Lavernais commanded crisply.

"Wait!" Orsanelli told them. Armand de Trevières had pricked his greedy bourgeois curiosity, which was precisely what Armand de Trevières had aimed to do. "Wait!" and then to Lavernais, "Leave me alone with the prisoner!" he said grandly.

"You wish it?" Lavernais doubted his own ears.

"I demand it!"

"But, Citizen Prefect——" Lavernais protested.

But vanity and curiosity were going to win the day. "With his hands tied he is perfectly harmless," the Prefect said grandiloquently.

"Very well, then," Lavernais conceded with a shrug, "since you insist, but the gendarmes must stay."

"I said, *'to you alone,'*" de Trevières told Orsanelli sternly.

"The gendarmes will remain," Lavernais said tersely.

"But——" Armand began.

"You can accept or refuse these conditions,"

Lavernais said in a quiet tone that meant what it spoke. "To no other will we agree."

"Then they must remain out of earshot," the Chevalier bargained.

"Certainly," Lavernais said instantly, "they will not attempt to listen to your communication to the Prefect."

"Then—since I must," Armand said, shrugging, "on those conditions, I accept."

"Clear the room," Lavernais ordered.

And Roche and Maillard bustled the servants out, and followed them, closing the doors.

"Have you any weapons on you?" Lavernais asked the Chevalier quietly.

"No," Armand told him.

Lavernais put out his hand to search—it was his duty—but his eyes met de Trevières's eyes, and the hussar's hand dropped to his side.

"I give you my word of honor," the outlaw said, smiling into the soldier's eyes.

Lavernais bowed to his prisoner, and turned to the guards. "Keep your eyes on Monsieur le Chevalier, gendarmes! At the first attempt at flight you have my authority to fire on the prisoner. Place yourselves one in front of each door. Do not listen, but watch. Now I will leave you, Citizen Prefect. But I shall stay near at hand. At the first call I'll be here." And with a glance all about, and a friendly nod, that might have been for Orsanelli, he sauntered out, closing the door he passed through.

"What a very suspicious young fellow," Armand said lightly, as the guards dropped back to their posts out of earshot, and as they did so Armand de Trevières, dare-devil that he was, had the impudence to wink at them both—"appallingly suspicious. And yet he had charming manners. Under less adverse circumstances I could have taken quite a liking to him."

"Silence!" Dignity thundered, banging on the table with its huge hairy fist.

"Ah—I'm afraid I can scarcely say the same of you, my friend," Purple Mask drawled.

"Enough of this foolery!" Orsanelli was furious. He seated himself behind the table, and placed a pistol significantly ready to his hand. (And over his shoulder de Trevières again winked at one gendarme.) "Well, I am listening. What have you to say to me?"

"Simply this, Monsieur le Prefect," the devil-may-care said lazily—with an indolent wink at the second gendarme—"only this, have you considered the proposition I made to you in writing a short time ago? Have you the ten thousand livres ready?"

The Prefect towered up to his feet, almost apoplectic with rage. "Sacré die!" he thundered, "take him away!" The gendarmes took a step toward Armand—not very quickly. "No, wait!" Orsanelli checked them. And they fell back again. "I am curious to see how far you intend to carry this joke," he sneered at the Chevalier. And so he was.

"Oh!" Monsieur de Trevières told him sadly,

"it is no joke; I assure you it is a very serious business—for you! Well, are you going to give me the money?"

"Ten thousand livres!" Orsanelli said it almost pleasantly—too pleasantly.

"That is the sum at which your ransom is fixed," Armand de Trevières replied even more amiably. And his good humor rang true. Orsanelli's did not.

"Rather a high price, is it not?" the Prefect bantered ironically.

"Republican prefects are very precious!" the Royalist said.

"Well, what more?" Orsanelli growled.

"That is all," the Comte de Trevières answered suavely. "If you pay, then, in that way, you will avoid the discomforts of being abducted—the tiresome journey over bad roads—insufficient food, and imprisonment till such time as we receive your ransom. Bonaparte, or your friends, may think it worth while to pay it quickly, or again he may not. As a sensible man you will realize, I am sure, that I am offering you advantageous terms."

"Oh!" the Citizen Orsanelli spluttered and jeered, "it's as serious as that, is it, my fine fellow? And, if I refuse, you will abduct me by force?"

"At midnight!"

CHAPTER XX

BY THE PREFECT'S ORDERS

SO sure was the tone, so proud and serene the eye of the man, who, standing there, unarmed, manacled, a gendarme armed to the teeth on his either hand, said with all the brave authority of unconquerable conviction, "At midnight," that the soul of Citizen Orsanelli, poor and shrunken at best, quailed. And there was something else: no revolution can uproot the inherent soul-qualities that divide master and man, those deep-burned brands of Nature which we call "caste." The rabble and the regicide, the trouserless unwashed, can rape, ruin and mutilate, but they never can rule. God has not willed it so. Nature forbids it. Since before the days of Clovis and of Saint Louis the fathers of this Republican blustering and cowering in the great chair had been liegemen or serfs of the fathers of Armand de Trevières. The man quailed at the eye of his master. And Rebellion shrank back ashamed at the sound of Loyalty's clarion. The petty and sordid was awed by the big, the idealist.

For Armand de Trevières, out at elbow, down at heel, patched, laughing, seemingly careless, was an idealist, vowed to a vocation and an ideal as truly—yes, and as purely—as any nun kneeling at convent midnight before the crucifix symbol of Revelation's greatest ideal. He was vowed to reseat Louis the

Bourbon on the throne of Charlemagne, wedded to that cause as truly, as devoutly, as any cloistered nun to her Lord; not because of his devotion to a middle-aged man—holding a tattered, peripatetic shadow of Court, unwelcomed, hounded, cold-shouldered and driven—Russia to-day, Verona to-morrow, Liége, Brussels yesterday—though that devotion was sincere and tender, but because of his greater devotion to an ideal of which Louis his King was the expression and symbol, an ideal which to Armand de Trevières and those who saw with him soul to soul was then, and is now, the highest social ideal, humanity's fairest flower and truest safeguard. He laughed and he masked. He danced alike through escapades, victories, and troubles. He declined to take his own inconvenience and dire deprivations seriously. And Armand Comte de Trevières did not take his loyalty sadly. Why should he? The best thing he had: his wealth and his joy? The French aristocrat does nothing sadly —not even dying.

Orsanelli quailed, and listened uneasily in his long claret-colored coat and the wonderful tri-colored sash, but he looked at the carbines in the arms of the gendarmes alert at the door, he thought of the small army out in the corridor, his but to call, he thought of a little, dominant man at Paris, and he gathered up his Republicanism, and blustered it out.

"I am curious," he said with a sneer, toying sug-

gestively with his pistol, "to see how you will set about it."

The prisoner laughed merrily. "You could not be more admirably situated for the best view. You have, as it were, the most expensive seats for the play," he told Orsanelli reassuringly.

"Well," the Prefect said grimly, "I am so curious to get this view that instead of dismissing you to prison immediately, I shall keep you here, under my eye, until midnight."

The Chevalier bowed courteously. "You will not have long to wait," he said, "only three minutes more."

Orsanelli rose up in his wrath, a fat figure of rage and official importance. "For effrontery and brazen impudence," he said hotly, "I have never met your equal." He crossed to the door on the right as he spoke, and threw it open grandiloquently. At the very threshold stood Brigadier Caron, flanked by his covey of gendarmes. "Look!" the Prefect cried, "look here! There are four soldiers at this door."

"I see them," the Royalist said sweetly. He bowed to them, too, low, with mock deference. "Good evening, gentlemen!" he said in the friendliest tone.

Brigadier Caron grinned. But the Prefect Orsanelli strutted across the room to the other door. "And see," he said severely, opening it, "four others at this door!"

"That makes eight," the dare-devil said sadly

shaking his ribald head in mock despair, "alas is me!" Then with his hand upon his heart—he could just manage it, handcuffs and all—he bowed to these hussars more profoundly than he had to their fellows, and said to them in honey tones, "Good evening, gentlemen!"

Orsanelli banged one door to, and at a signal from him, Caron quietly closed the other. "There are also men under this window," the Prefect went on, "and the park is full of gendarmes and hussars."

"So I understand," de Trevières replied politely. "And I am delighted to know it, Monsieur le Prefect. Such distinguished company, such insurmountable obstacles lend éclat to my little adventures."

Orsanelli grunted angrily, and slouched back to the desk, and picked up the pistol.

"Dear, dear, Citizen, how impatient you are growing!" Armand upbraided him tenderly; even there was sympathy in his voice.

Orsanelli stood moodily in front of the fire—his eyes on his gendarmes. In them he placed his trust and such pseudo-composure as his vanity could show.

They were watching the prisoner—no eyes to spare even to a Prefect, and a very fat one at that.

Armand de Trevières lounged against an old bureau, smiling into space.

There was a breath of silence through the room —suspense almost personified. And then the great clock struck. One! It was the first stroke of midnight. Armand de Trevières held up a dramatic finger, and his eyes danced madly. Two! "The

hour has come!" he said impressively. "I commence!"

At something in the aristocrat's quiet voice, at something in the democratic quality of his own heart, Jacques Orsanelli recoiled. "Gendarmes!" he cried sharply—not knowing why—Armand had not even looked at him yet—"Gendarmes!"

And they obeyed the terror, and the entreaty, the command in his cry. Never was officer so obeyed before!

On the instant—it took less than that for them to take an unspoken something from de Trevières's eyes—on the instant they sprang forward to Orsanelli's side.

Caron struck the pistol down out of the Prefect's hand!

Armand de Trevières swooped on it, and covered the Citizen Orsanelli, all in a breath.

"One movement—one cry—and you are a dead man," he said quietly; and Orsanelli, looking into the Comte's calm eyes, knew that he told the truth. Orsanelli did not move. Orsanelli did not cry out. It was not his cue to do either, and he knew it. Caron held his left arm and his coat collar in a vice. Maillard gripped his right arm no less securely. And the barrel of his own pistol flashed death into his terror-widened eyes. He was handcuffed too—so quickly that he never knew which of his treacherous soldiers had done it, or if both.

It was a very trying moment for Citizen Orsa-

nelli, Monsieur le parfait Préfect—sans peur et sans reproche!

To do him justice he grasped at once what the trick had been. "Accomplices!" he said bitterly.

"Allow me to introduce them to you!" de Trevières said gayly, "Monsieur le Baron de Blank-Blank, Monsieur le Vicomte de Blanker-Blanker."

At their absurd pseudonyms the erstwhile gendarmes bowed to the indignant Orsanelli, with such grace of obeisance as few among the wearers of their present uniform could execute.

"Royalists," the poor Prefect muttered.

"Precisely!" de Trevières said, with a courteous little gesture of the weapon he held. "I regret not to mention their names more exactly. But it might conduce to inconvenience at some future enterprise. Old and valued friends of mine! Vowed to our cause! Ready at its call! The gendarmes coming from Damville, unfortunately, met with a slight accident on the road, which to their acute regret, and believe me, Monsieur Citizen, to ours, prevented them from arriving here to have the honor to be in attendance on your illustrious self. My friends here took their place. When I climbed the wall, they hurled themselves on me, and took me prisoner—without the slightest difficulty!"

It is pleasant to record of a man, whom truth has compelled one to praise with some reservation, that the Citizen Prefect, handcuffed, one to three, was showing now to better advantage than he had a few moments ago, merely apprehensive of some

such contretemps, and flanked by his two "trusty" guards. There are few of us indeed who do not gain something of courage, when a threatened and tremblingly feared evil has actually fallen. He had no mind to excite or to offend the glittering barrel of his own pistol, mishanded at the moment unfortunately, but he said, with some confidence, and in a voice that did not quaver, to the man who held it, "So far very clever, but you have still to get away."

"And to get away with you into the bargain," de Trevières reminded him cheerfully.

"Ah! that will be a difficult business!" the Prefect said almost jubilantly.

"On the contrary," Armand retorted pleasantly, "it is exceedingly simple."

"You can hardly expect me to believe that all our soldiers are your accomplices," Orsanelli said hotly.

"By no means," the Chevalier laughed. "But we have gossiped enough. Time presses! The gag, if you please now, Baron!" To Orsanelli he said in accents of grave regret, "Excuse this necessary formality, my dear Prefect. We are desolated to so inconvenience you!" And in a trice, before the bewildered statesman had glimpsed at their infamous project, de Vivonne and de Morsanne had gagged the Prefect of Evreux. He trembled with rage—with rage now even more than with fear, but he did not struggle. He knew better.

"Oh! the fat jelly!" de Morsanne said to the Baron. Orsanelli heard him, of course, and it did not calm the prefectorial indignation.

But they had not handled him roughly—far from it! They had done their necessary touching of him gingerly even, as if their Royalist fingers liked none too well the feel of Republicanism so strong and so rank.

"He'll be a picture!" Armand said merrily, throwing off his cloak and his hat and tossing them to his friends.

He had been well clad, Monsieur le Comte de Trevières; for uncloaked and unhatted, he still was hatted and cloaked!

He had been wearing two identical hats, two cloaks twin to a stitch.

Poor Orsanelli! his eyes bulged almost out of his face with red rage, and his face was as purple as the cloak that Monsieur de Vivonne (Caron that was) bundled about him. And there were three human jellies ashake there now, though two were not fat, for the "gendarmes" were almost overcome by their own ribald mirth—the mad roysterers.

They cloaked and they hatted him—the poor, poor Orsanelli. Then they masked him! De Trevières had a second mask ready, needless to say.

"Excellent!" he cried to the shrouded, outraged figure. "Admirable! Vraiment—you *are* a picture! A study in purple! A poem *au masque!* Really, my dear Prefect, you look a great deal more like the Purple Mask than I do. Baron, meet me at the cross-roads at Vernon!"

"Right!" de Vivonne acquiesced briskly. He

drew out his own pistol and leveled it significantly. "And you, my fine fellow," he admonished the swathed mountain at his side, gripping its arm in his hand, "if you make the slightest noise, the smallest attempt to resist, you are a dead man. A Royalist's word of honor for that, my citizen of a republic!"

But again Paul de Vivonne delayed; to laugh. He couldn't help it. They were so absurdly alike, the two purple-cloaked figures—droll in their likeness, droller even in their contrast. Identical to a T in their garb. One fat and perturbed, bursting with rage. One lithe as some strong king of the jungle, and doubled in uncontrollable mirth—but only for an instant. For time pressed.

"Now!" de Trevières commanded, and as he and de Morsanne hid—shrieking with laughter—behind the long, heavy window curtains, the Baron de Vivonne led his unhappy victim to the door on the left, and opened it.

The brigadier on guard there barred the way, of course, with "Halt! What is it?"

"The Chevalier of the Purple Mask," de Vivonne the gendarme said proudly, "whom I am taking to the prison of Evreux, by the Prefect's orders."

"Good!" applauded the brigadier. "Pass, friend!" and he fell back and his hussars with him. De Vivonne closed the door as he went. And such was the passing of the Citizen Orsanelli from his own Prefecture. We know where we are—as a rule—but we know not where we may go!

"Splendid! It has all gone like clockwork!" Armand said softly as they came from the curtains. "And now, mon cher, for the last move in the game!"

One rapid glance round the room, and he had selected his canvas—a clear space of blank wall—sprung on a chair, and taken a big purple chalk from his pocket. "I take what I will," he scrawled quickly in huge, jubilant letters. And beneath the motto, for signature, he traced in a trice a large purple mask, and sprang down lightly, saying exultantly, "Really, my dear de Morsanne, it is wonderful what a few brains and a devil of a lot of cheek will accomplish in this world!"

Well—he had proved it.

At the other door the petite comedy was reenacted as unchecked and as undetected.

"Hullo! Where are you going? Who is this?"

"The Chevalier of the Purple Mask, whom I am taking to the prison at Evreux, by the Prefect's orders."

"Congratulations! Pass!"

Ye gods, they were off. St. Denis be thanked! And now, helter skelter, fast as they could, captive and captor arm in arm, laughing and running—saints how they ran, when once free of the house!—off for the gap in the wall, and the cross-roads at Vernon!

CHAPTER XXI

"THE MOVING WHY"

JOHN WESLEY resented the Devil's monopoly of all the pretty tunes, and insisted that faith and virtue well might afford to be as glad and sing as tunefully as vice, blasphemy and debauchery. It was a gentleman's theory, an aristocrat breed of mind that stamps Wesley as of noble descent quite irrespective of what his family tree may or may not reveal.

From John Wesley to Armand de Trevières is a far cry—most certainly. Yet, push superfluities aside, and the two men had a great deal in common: courage, good sense, clean hands, and above all their splendid, manly theory of conduct. Both were rare good company, full of charm, venturesome, born ramblers, a little careless of financial consequences, ready to lend, carelessly ready to borrow at times, gay, devoted, self-assured and reeking with magnetism.

De Trevières had lived at times in ways of which the fervent preacher would not have approved and still less have paid the flattery of imitation; but, for that matter, the reverse was as true—and the hands of the French Comte, in all the essentials, were nearly as clean as those of the English zealot.

This is the story of a great game of bluff—but under the bluff, the fun and the frolic, a spiritual fire

burned white and clear—a fire no more to be quenched by the imperial trappings and amenities of the Emperor so soon to be crowned than it had been by the rougher oppositions of Republican sway that even now was little more than a name.

Napoleon—so soon to be crowned—had forgiven Joseph Fouché and reinstated him, and that wily regicide was persecuting the Royalists in a frenzy of zeal, which was far more to prove itself and to prove Fouché's devotion and ability than it was to do France or Napoleon any specific service. Indeed Bonaparte himself even then leaned to a policy of reconciliation of the Legitimists, a policy he was to test to the full as soon as he had assumed the purple of France.

But the soul of Royalist conspiracy, as rife in France then as it had been in the first distraught days of the Terror's triumph, was as invulnerable to the insidious blandishment of imperial clemency as it was to the discipline of the Republic's harsh rule and primitive rigors. The true Royalists were irreconcilable. Armand de Trevières had, it is true, many of the qualities of the new order—some of its ready camaraderie, a little of its bluffness, its indifference to forms, its content and skill at makeshift. But he was as invincibly King's man first, last and all the time, as de Clamorgan himself, de Clamorgan too bitter to be "reconciled," as the Abbé Brochard too staunchly loyal, or little Laurette herself, in whose sweet girl-heart an abiding

fealty to "Louis our King" was as indispensable and as ineradicable as her faith in "Our Lady" was.

Laurette de Chateaubriant had kept her heart and her soul sweet and garnished with her flowers, her birds, her books, her own gentle thoughts, the pleasant industries of her daily life; but, for all that, it was an arid life for a girl, overfull of monotony and soured by anxiety; or rather it would have been soured in the living of any one less exquisitely sweet than this little French girl-aristocrat who sold bonnets and laces by day in the shop downstairs, and by night illumined a missal, played on her harp, and dreamed her young dreams.

And in spite of everything, she had contrived to hold very fast to happiness, the brave little motherless thing! To three rocks she had anchored her staunch, tender heart: to Louis her King, to her Church, and—for the last two years this—to her hero, Monsieur le Chevalier—the Purple Mask.

But from this last anchorage her anchor chain had pulled, if not loosened, a little the last day or two; and because it had done so, Laurette was miserable—whenever she realized, as she did now and then, that her heart had a little strayed from her hero the Purple Mask, had a little tugged at its fond mooring. To her white taste, treachery was, of all the crimes, foulest, most unforgivable. And she felt that there was something of treachery to her dear Chevalier in this new interest that had kindled in her heart—a sudden interest in Armand de Trevières. It was a very tiny conflagration as

yet but a spark had caught at a twig of her heart's green young wood, and now and again it crackled —and Laurette wondered, was frightened, and ashamed. For, in spite of herself, she knew remotely what had happened, what ailed! To feel even so modest an interest, as she undoubtedly did feel, in a stranger, who, beyond the compliment of their age and their class, had evinced none in her, a man in no sense declared her "pretender," humiliated her in her own eyes, but to have taken from the Chevalier of the Purple Mask even one thought to bestow on another—another man!—was a thousandfold worse. And while Armand de Trevières was abducting the cloaked and shrouded Orsanelli, and seeking to deposit him with Farmer Jacques Cros, as enjoined by de Clamorgan, little Laurette was tossing and twisting unhappily on her white bed, upbraiding herself for an inconstant, and resolving to drive from her very memory this sudden sensation of—of friendship for Monsieur de Trevières. It was a brave resolve, and she pursued it bravely. But she lagged behind it somewhat, though she plodded on breathlessly. Not that she was insincere either in her love of the Purple Mask, or in her resolve to banish every other face from the heart she had dedicated to him. But she found a difficulty. Armand de Trevières was tangible—very. Purple Mask was something of an abstraction, and for the first time the girl realized him so. He seemed a little misty, film-like, focussed beside the newcomer so undeniably real, from the laugh

in his eye to the smile on his mouth, the sound of his voice, the clasp of his hand.

"Which did she care for?" she asked herself squarely at last. Somehow this new, sudden feeling, like the new man, seemed very, very real, and if in a sense less splendid, less exquisite, yet more satisfactory, more comfortable, more companionable. Towards dawn she fell asleep, wondering feverishly where her silly heart was after all. She knew she had lost it—but to whom? And if it *had* strayed from its vowed allegiance, her heart—and she of a race always loyal!—had strayed to a vagrant, a man known but for an hour, a man even now perhaps passed from her life forever, why?

Why? Why had it happened?

CHAPTER XXII

IN SUSPENSE

IT was cold in Paris the next day. May often is cold there, but this thirteenth was almost viciously crisp. Laurette was glad of the fire in her chamber as she dressed, and Baptiste was careful to light a good fire in the cellar against the return of Monsieur l'Abbé. The priest had slipped out before dawn in search of news. That search might involve considerable risk to-day, and whoever ran risk, de Clamorgan must not—for on him depended

their all. He it was who planned and determined; and his inflexible determination and his cold, dauntless optimism were the buttress upon which all their labor and all their purpose leaned. Whoever else was caught—and silenced—de Clamorgan must not be. He was both their compass and their helm. They could not live an hour on this rough sea of plot and counterplot without his guidance and force.

And so the old priest had crept out into the early gray to find and bring some essentials of news. But he should be back soon, and his underground refuge was snug and comfortable for him, when he did come.

One wing of the old cellar had been transformed into a sitting-room, and study. It had been skillfully done; and here Brochard passed most of his waking hours; here the conspirator friends held their gravest conclaves, drew up their proclamations and their plans, and kept in good hiding their documents.

They risked their lives, of course, in plotting at all against Bonaparte and the turbulent will of their preponderant countrymen. But they did it with a good deal of creature comfort. And why not? Dangerous work prospers longest in comfortable surroundings, and even has, so executed, some added chance of success. And certainly the old Abbé deserved some creature consideration from his fellow-workers, for he gave them and the Cause his all: a selfless old man living and dying in the service of his Church and the service of his King.

There were rugs on the floor, and the cold stone walls were hung with tapestries. A large shaded lamp hung from the ceiling. There were a sofa, large and altogether comfortable, an easy-chair and two or three smaller seats, a footstool, a table, a writing-desk, a sideboard, a shelf of books and even a good ornament or two. There were fresh flowers, Laurette saw to that always. The desk was well littered with papers. The sideboard was well stocked with food, and with the necessaries for serving it. Almost the Abbé could have lived out a siege here.

In one corner of the room (to call it a room is to call it more conveniently than correctly) in a wide archway a small flight of narrow steps led up to the trapdoor which lifted into the shop above. There were no windows cut into the outer world, and only one of any sort, a little barred square through which one could just see into the cellars and vaults beyond. The little window was just between the archway of the stairs and a similar archway which led, through dark and tortuous passages, to other and still other cellars. It was a honeycomb of a place. Opposite the sideboard there was a low, inconspicuous door. The lamp was lit. It was always lit when the place was in use.

Early in this morning, they had but just breakfasted, de Clamorgan sat at the desk busily writing. A quietly-dressed woman sat near him waiting and silent. In the cellar beyond half a dozen men were working, directed by de Morlève and Madame de

Grisolles. They looked to be sorting and placing casks and barrels of liquor, but it was weapons the barrels held, and the little casks were terrible with gunpowder.

The men were working by the light of two lanterns, one held by Madame de Grisolles in the inner cellar, one by de Morlève in the corridor.

Evidently the workmen were trusted Royalists, for all that took place or was said in either one of these two cellars could be heard and seen in the other.

"Steady there!" de Morlève cautioned one worker.

"Bring that empty barrel in here, Pierre!" the Comtesse ordered another, "and fill it with the bayonets—exactly as you have the others."

And de Clamorgan, without lowering his voice, said to the waiting woman, "You may get ready to start, Madame de Breau. I have just finished."

"I am quite ready," she said, rising and crossing to him. And the hand she held out for the paper was steady and calm, as her voice and her eyes were. But the errand on which the Chief of the Royalists was sending her might well end at the guillotine. She looked a simple, commonplace body enough, neat—because she was French, but poorly clad—because she was poor, plainly clad—because she was elderly and serious; altogether bourgeoise and unnotable, a shopkeeper perhaps, or some minor merchant's wife. But the woman was not what she looked. She was—both by birth and by marriage—

of the oldest noblesse. And in all Paris the Bonaparte had no enemy more dangerous, skillful, intrepid.

"It is made out in the name of Citizeness Galleran," the Marquis said as he gave her the passport.

Madame de Breau took it, and scrutinized it critically. There were no sharper eyes in Paris than hers. The tears they had shed—and those tears had been many and bitter—had not dulled those eyes, but rather had quickened and cleared them. The eyes of Henriette de Breau were one of the valued assets of King Louis's adherents.

"Wonderful!" she said approvingly. The sharp eyes had been unable to detect the slightest trace of the alteration that she knew had been made in the passport—and she knew where to look!

"You must start for Calais at once, Madame," de Clamorgan said with courteous peremptoriness. "There is time, but none to lose. You will give the despatches to Cadonal—to Cadonal only. He will meet you as you turn out of the market-place, and will ask you to direct him to the Hôtel-Dieu. He will ask you how long it will take him to reach it. And when he thanks you, he will dry his forehead with a green handkerchief that has a border of tricolor. And you will point to the bouquet in his coat, and say, 'Your violets are very charming, Monsieur. Can you tell me the hour?' "

She nodded.

"Are they in cypher?" she said.

"Surely," he told her.

"And the key?"

"Cadonal has already received it. I sent it to him by our last messenger."

"Excellent!" Madame said briefly.

"Nothing has been overlooked or neglected," the Marquis added. "Cadonal has had full particulars of our plans—for the rescue of the Duc on the fifteenth. I have instructed him to charter the ship, and have her at Calais by the fourteenth, and to wait there until you arrive. The despatches you carry will give him the fullest instructions as to where on the coast he is to meet us, and when, and the exact details of how we are to embark the Duc for England. So, you will realize their importance."

Madame de Breau smiled a little at that. "Without doubt," she replied. "And the honor you do me in entrusting them to me."

"We know your fidelity, Madame, and your courage," the Marquis answered, bowing low. "They have been well tried time and again, my dear Baronne."

He took up the packet of despatches from the desk and examined the seal scrupulously. The wax was quite dry. "It is entirely ready," he said, and laid the precious parcel in her hands. And she put it in her basket, only half covered by a package of cheap gloves, an old neck shawl and a book of devotions.

"By the way, Madame," de Clamorgan added, as he went with her ceremoniously to the stairs, "be

good enough to say to Cadonal, when you see him, that still we have had no further word from the Chevalier. Of course, I have arranged to do without him; it has become a necessity. And do without him we shall. But his loss, if lost he is, will be to his Majesty's cause a misfortune most deplorable, irreparable."

At the stairs she turned and gave him her hand, and he bent over it, and kissed the shabby black glove à la aristocrat. "Adieu, Madame, and God speed you in your enterprise," the old nobleman said solemnly.

And the woman returned as earnestly, "And you in yours, Monsieur le Marquis! Adieu!" She went steadily up the stairs, her basket slung carelessly on her arm, and at the signal stamped by de Clamorgan, some one above lifted the trapdoor and the Baronne had gone—out to her dangerous errand; a stout-hearted, clever woman; walking wearily, a little lame, through the Paris streets, a shabby gray shawl pathetically worn à la Joséphine on her limp shoulders. But in a bureau chez-elle Henriette de Breau still treasured a great comb of diamond fleur-de-lys, and she could dance like a girl yet, and sink to the ground with an ease and a grace incomparable, when it pleased God to bring her exiled master and King back to his own.

Valentine de Grisolles came through the arch as Madame de Breau went up the stairs.

"We have finished," she told Monsieur de Clamorgan, and added, "Ah, this time, Marquis,

we shall succeed! I am confident! It is that everything has been so well foreseen, and arranged for so perfectly."

"Everything except the strange silence of the Chevalier," de Clamorgan reminded her gloomily. "However," he added stoutly, "all we have to do now is to await the news of the arrest of his understudy. Yesterday de Trevières left Paris. By this time he should be a prisoner in the hands of Fouché's agents."

"God grant it!" Valentine de Grisolles said devotedly.

As de Morlève came from the inner cellar three raps sounded on the ceiling.

"The Abbé!" de Clamorgan said quickly. "Open the trap. At last we shall know something definite!"

CHAPTER XXIII

TANGLED

"WELL, what news?" the Marquis greeted the Abbé, as the priest came down the steps.

"None!" was the disappointing reply. "None as yet from Evreux! And not a word, in the journals, about the Purple Mask!"

Valentine de Grisolles bit her lip angrily. "What if de Trevières has ruined our plan by not allowing himself to be captured?" she demanded bitterly.

"Impossible!" the Marquis said, frowning. "He could not escape both Fouché and Brisquet."

Again the signal knock! And again the leader said sharply, "Open the trap."

"Who can that be?" the Comtesse asked unquietly.

"It is Laurette," de Clamorgan replied. And de Morlève went quickly to the trap.

It was Laurette.

And it was Laurette in a very high state of excitement.

"My Uncle! My Uncle!" she said breathlessly, coming down the stairs with an agitated little run.

"What is the matter, Laurette?" the Marquis demanded sternly—almost coldly. He scented bad news, and there was nothing upon which his policy was more insistent than entire sang-froid in times of peril or disaster. His experience had taught him that at such times no other thing was so valuable as coolness imperturbable coolness; not even courage, not even agility of thought.

"The Comte de Trevières!"—the girl began pantingly.

"Well?" de Clamorgan's voice had something of the pistol's decisive crispness. It often had.

"He is upstairs!" Laurette said breathlessly, her cheeks aflame, her eyes like dancing blue stars.

Where is your coolness now, Monsieur le Marquis de Clamorgan? Gone! Crushed to nothing beneath the bombshell of the girl's news.

De Trevières upstairs! But it was impossible.

"Upstairs!" the uncle said blankly. He was stupefied—aghast. And the others there were as dumfounded; de Morlève perhaps a little less surprised than the rest. He had gauged his rival more justly than either the Abbé or Madame de Grisolles had. And the Marquis de Clamorgan, usually an astute reader of men, had misread Armand de Trevières rather crassly.

"In the shop!" Laurette asserted.

"He is in Paris?" the Marquis said dazedly.

"Probably he never left it," Valentine said bitterly.

Laurette de Chateaubriant hurled contempt from angry blue eyes at Madame de Grisolles—contempt and not a little hatred. Raoul de Morlève saw the look, and sighed.

"He says he must see you at once," the girl told her uncle proudly. And the voice was cold enough now—ice-cold. "He has news of the greatest importance."

"He has?" the Marquis said wonderingly. "Well—I will go to him—but, no, on second thought, I will not. It is time to open the shop in another quarter of an hour. We must not talk there. I will hear what this fine substitute Chevalier has to say, of course. A tale to match his valor and his performance of a promise, no doubt. But I must hear him. He knows too much for me to ignore him with safety. Show him down here," he concluded grimly.

"Down here?" Laurette distrusted her hearing.

The Marquis never broke his own rules. And he had no rule more absolute than that no stranger, foe *or* friend, should be told of, much less come down into this buried retreat, hidden stronghold.

And the others had heard him with surprise equal to Laurette's. Valentine looked at him curiously. But she said nothing. She trusted his judgment as completely as she trusted the man—and that was absolutely and entirely. A dominant woman, her judgment yielded her dominance to his always. There was no affection between these two—they were somewhat hard-natured both, and each was utterly obsessed in the Cause for which they lived and worked, obsessed to the exclusion of any more subjective feeling. It was a mental subservience that she yielded him, a sort of intellectual hero-worship. And it was more complete in its surrender and its fealty than the subservience of any woman less dominant could have been. She obeyed because she trusted. She trusted because she recognized his singleness of purpose, and the cold sureness of his methods.

But de Morlève and Brochard spoke, and they voiced their identical surprise, their incredulity, in the selfsame monosyllable.

"Here?" they exclaimed.

"Yes," the Marquis told Laurette briefly. And she at once went back up the stairs. *She* had been surprised, not shocked. She saw no reason why Armand de Trevières might not wisely be shown

this or any other secret place, told any dangerous confidence, trusted all in all.

"I have my reasons," de Clamorgan vouched to the others—a shade less curtly than he had spoken to the girl. "As for this refuge, to-morrow we shall have left it."

"Why?" Brochard demanded, voicing the question the others only thought.

To brook much questioning was no part of Jean de Clamorgan's method or practice. But, after all, Brochard was a priest, and a priest has privilege which no temporal superior or tyrant can ignore quite, privilege beyond that of Valentine de Grisolles's sex, and quite foreign to de Morlève's few years.

"Why?" the Abbé asked, and de Clamorgan answered him:

"Now that our plans are so definitely made—so altogether perfected in their detail—I have come to the conclusion that it will be more prudent for us to scatter until the fifteenth. It would be too deplorable, were we to attract suspicion in any untoward way, now when we are at our very goal. The business here will go on as usual. Baptiste will supervise everything. The sisters Roudil will waste and blunder, sans doute," he said with a shrug. "But," with another, "the ready purse of Monsieur le Capitaine Lavernais will soon obligingly repair that."

"You are quite determined not to come to England with us, with the Duc?" the Abbé asked.

"We shall all go, I now think. But when things have cleared a little, and I have held conference with the King and with Cadonal, de Morlève and I shall return to France, probably. Monsieur de Morlève and I can be of more use here, you and the rest of more use more immediately within reach of his Majesty."

"Where shall we each go—to-morrow?" the priest said next.

"Madame de Grisolles and Monsieur de Morlève with you, my father, to the Bernadine Convent. Laurette with me to the quiet little villa outside St. Cloud. It will be least noticeable for us to go there, where all, who know anything of us, know that we make it home, even more than we do this Paris shop. And when—but hush!"

CHAPTER XXIV

NEWS INDEED

AT the head of the stairs—following Laurette —Armand de Trevières paused to bow to Madame de Grisolles.

"Good evening, Madame! Good evening, gentlemen," he said gayly. And coming down the stairs he crossed to the Marquis, and held out his hand. "My dear Marquis——" he began.

De Clamorgan clasped his own hands insolently

behind his back and ignored the proffered greeting.

The makeshift's easy carriage stiffened, his face set as in a vice, he stopped short instantly, and his hazel eyes shot out a signal of anger almost as full of fire and warning as that which leapt from the blue eyes of Laurette.

De Trevières caught the expression on the girl's proud little face, and his own softened incredibly, and he looked back at the Marquis more in amusement than in anger, a light smile on his fine lip.

"Monsieur de Trevières," de Clamorgan said superbly, "when a mission as important as the one which we confided to you is once accepted, one succeeds or one dies."

De Trevières laughed a little—lightly. But the laugh was cold. "Quite so," he said smoothly. "I preferred to succeed."

They all looked at him sharply, not altogether crediting their own hearing, and crediting his words even less—all but Laurette. Her blue eyes were adoring just then—and adorable. Madame de Grisolles point-blank disbelieved him—he was a mountebank and a boaster. The Abbé and Raoul de Morlève read him more truly—but yet—the thing he claimed—it was an impossibility.

"What!"—de Clamorgan's smooth hard armor of calm equipoise was shivered, and rent beneath the weight of his sharp surprise. And, too, something very like conviction curdled in his mind—"you have——?"

"I have kidnaped the Citizen Orsanelli," Ar-

mand drawled; and the lazy indifference of his tone was an insolence and a taunt: offense and rebuke.

No one spoke. No one could. The perfect silence of stupefaction held the room—all but Laurette. Laurette was too happy to speak. But her heart sang.

"You have kidnaped Orsanelli," the Marquis whispered hoarsely—when he could articulate.

De Trevières replied with an inflection and a sound that were an affirmative, but that cannot be spelled or described. It was careless. It was contemptuous.

"When? How?" Valentine asked peremptorily —a woman dares.

"Where?" Brochard begged courteously.

"Yesterday—at midnight—at Evreux," de Trevières said superciliously.

"It is unbelievable," the Abbé exclaimed, doubt and admiration mingled in his voice.

Armand de Trevières turned to the old priest with a laugh, that was almost affectionate. "And pray, my father, what did you suppose I was going to do?" he said.

"Was the Prefect not guarded?" Valentine de Grisolles asked gropingly.

"Not guarded!" de Trevières retorted. "Name of the devil! He was surrounded by an absolute army! Soldiers at every door of the house! Gendarmes behind every tree in the park!"

"And you kidnaped him in spite of them all?" little Laurette said in a glowing voice. The girl

was all glow—eyes, rose-leaf cheeks, glad young heart. This was her knight and he had achieved. He had accomplished the impossible. Forgotten the missing Chevalier! Forgotten the imprisoned, imperiled Duc!

Armand de Trevières smiled down at her with a great declaration in the gentleness of his face. Her homage and congratulation were very sweet to him. To hang with the crusty old curmudgeon of an uncle! To hang with all of them—the others! This was his reward. Here was his guerdon and his hope.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," he said simply, but his eyes leapt to hers, "with the aid of two of my friends, I carried off Monsieur Orsanelli from under the very nose of Monsieur le Capitaine Lavernais and all his gendarmes and hussars. But," he added with quick compunction. "Lavernais is a fine little fellow. I could love him dearly, if he were a King's man."

"And what about Brisquet, Fouché's agent?" Valentine broke in impatiently. She was only half convinced even now of de Trevière's prowess, and altogether impatient of tender sideplay in the corner. Raw little love affairs must wait the convenience of grave conspiracy.

De Trevières shrugged his shoulders. "I have not yet had the pleasure of making Citizen Brisquet's acquaintance, Madame."

"Brisquet was not there?" the Abbé asked incredulously.

"He was not in evidence, Monsieur," Armand replied. "And de Morsanne, one of my friends who masqueraded among the gendarmes as one of themselves, gathered that Brisquet's non-arrival was causing the Captain Lavernais enormous surprise and a soupçon of consternation. It seems to be a disappearance for the Republicans as ill-timed as for us is the disappearance of our own Chevalier of the Purple Mask."

"You seemed to have filled the gap of the Chevalier's absence admirably," Brochard said dryly.

"Yes!" Laurette echoed ardently.

Armand de Trevières bowed to the Abbé. Laurette he thanked with his eyes.

"But Orsanelli," de Clamorgan interrupted sharply, "you took him prisoner?"

De Trevières bowed pleasantly. Just a hint of sarcasm tinged the high good humor of the motion.

"He is your prisoner still?"

De Trevières bowed—a little lower, as good-humoredly as before; the light sarcasm glinting a little sharper on his mouth and in his gesture.

"And what," de Clamorgan said anxiously, "have you done with your prisoner?"

"I have brought him to you," de Trevières said simply.

The room rocked!

Valentine de Grisolles clasped her hands together so suddenly that her nails cut her, and she watched de Clamorgan's face with terror in her own.

The old Abbé regarded the smiling dare-devil

curiously, a smile just touching the thin old lips that many years and much prayer had worn almost to a shadow. By the Mass! he liked this fellow.

Did Raoul de Morlève laugh? That was an enormity—if he did it—but the Baron de Morlève was young, and had been born with a quick sense of humor.

"I have brought him to you, Monsieur," the understudy of the Chevalier repeated gravely. But a wicked mirth twitched on his handsome mouth.

Jean de Clamorgan was speechless. He was stupefied! He was furious!

"You have brought him here?" the Marquis cried angrily—when he could speak. His voice cracked and hissed with rage. He scintillated anger. His hands trembled, and so did his face.

"Name of the devil!" Armand replied with comic mock impatience, seating himself nonchalantly on the table, and swinging one long leg lazily against its fellow. "What else was I to do with him? I could find not one trace of the farmer whose address you gave me, Monsieur de Clamorgan. The oldest inhabitants had never heard of him—did not even know his name! And I could not go on dragging the poor devil of an Orsanelli around a dark and muddy countryside all through the night, like a parcel that has been sent to the post wrongly addressed. For us, de Morsanne and de Vivonne and me, it was nothing—good fun—but the poor Orsanelli, he was dying of fright and of rage, and the only thing that preserved his worthless life was

that he could not make up his miserable mind whether to die of the one or of the other—the red anger or the pale, ashen fear. So—what would you? The only thing left for me to do was to bring him to you—to deliver the parcel to my superior officer, my employer—and so—me voilà! and——"

"You entered Paris with Orsanelli?" the Marquis gasped, even in his anger submerged in surprise. And the other men each took a step toward Armand de Trevières. Here *was* prowess indeed!

"Obviously!" the scapegrace said condescendingly.

"And where is he now?" the Marquis murmured helplessly—aghast.

"In a carriage at the shop door," was the nonchalant answer.

The Marquis de Clamorgan raised his hands to heaven—in despair—and sank limply into the armchair.

"Nom de Dieu!" Almost he sobbed it!

CHAPTER XXV

FOUR TO ONE

"NOM DE DIEU!" the old conspirator repeated. His consternation was pathetic. The four there, who knew him well, in all their long knowing of him had never before seen him break—anxious,

yes—puzzled, even—but broken never. Even Armand de Trevières, all his personal pride and all his pride of caste smarting beneath the injustice of de Clamorgan's suspicion, the lash of his unfriendly reception, was sorry for the distraught old aristocrat.

"Nom de Dieu," the Marquis said yet a third time. "In the street! At our door! All the Saints, what imprudence. Abbé! De Morlève! Quick! Bring him here!"

"Here, mon Oncle?" little Laurette said involuntarily, as Brochard and de Morlève went.

"Here!" de Clamorgan repeated. "Would you have me stock him among the gold braid and the chemisettes?" he snapped testily, "mark him a bonnet at ninety livres, or a fichu at two? Or should we leave him dangling like a sign just outside the street door to attract to us the amiable patronage of the police?" He turned to de Trevières and studied him ruefully from under raised and wrinkled eyebrows. Then he pulled himself together, and rose from his chair. For this was too dangerous, too irresponsible a dare-devil to offend needlessly. "I must congratulate you, my dear Comte," he said courteously, crossing to the other—but de Trevières did not see the outstretched hand—"congratulate you on the ingenuity of your plan, and on the brilliance of its successful execution. But," he added suavely, with a very friendly smile, "entre nous—quite entre nous—would it not have been more simple to have exacted the ransom, and then released your prisoner—straightaway?"

"Evidently," Armand agreed through pursed-up lips, a naughty twinkle in his eyes, his reckless head tilted to one side, and the inevitable shoulder play insouciantly eloquent. "Evidently—without doubt, only Monsieur Orsanelli refused to pay!"

"But—why?" de Clamorgan demanded. Again he was greatly surprised.

"He wouldn't explain," Armand replied, shaking his head. "And, personally, I confess his attitude puzzles me. There is something askew—something we've missed—some thread we've seized at the wrong end."

But Valentine de Grisolles, with her sharper woman's wits, saw no difficulty. "But no!" she said, "why should it puzzle you, Monsieur? It is altogether simple. While Orsanelli was in the open air, he counted on some lucky chance to save him—some rescue. Here, in this cellar, he will change his tone."

"I agree!" the Marquis said heartily. He crossed, moved closer to the Comtesse, and they began to speak together at a pitch of voices confidentially low rather than entirely considerate towards the man who had risked and accomplished so much. But Armand Comte de Trevières didn't care a jot. Not he! He went eagerly towards Laurette de Chateaubriant, and looked down at her with an old, old story in his eyes.

But all he said—in words—was, "You see, Mademoiselle, your wishes have brought me good luck."

"Oh," the girl said earnestly, lifting her charming eyes to his, not irresponsively, "if you only knew

how anxious I have been during these two days—all the time. I thought I should never see you again!"

The man's face flushed with emotion. She had told him more than she had meant to tell—more than she knew herself. Laurette had made him very proud and very happy. And he thanked her with his eyes; but all he said was, "But why?" and he said it lightly, with a smile, almost teasingly.

For answer she only dropped her eyes—a little frightened at the challenge they had read.

The man stood looking down at her, a very gentle light in his eyes, a very gentle look on his strong face. She was such a girl! And he had been and done and known so much!

There were steps overhead, and at the sound the Marquis and Madame ceased their half-whispered talk. The trapdoor was lifted gently.

"Here comes my prisoner!" de Trevières announced with a chuckle.

Such a prisoner!

Even Laurette—her tender heart unable not to be sorry even for a Republican in such a plight—smiled a little at the absurd picture stumbling and almost trembling down the stairs, supported gravely by the Abbé on one side, less gravely by de Morlève on the other. A great tall man almost helpless from muffling, a vast cloak wrapped about him till he looked like a fat mummy—and very untidily swathed at that—the cloak's collar like a coarse ugly Elizabethan ruff rampant about his ears, a huge hat

pulled down to his very eyes. A big bundle so little like a man—far more like the postal parcel of Armand's gibing—that one might have doubted its humanness, but that it moved. And it moved absurdly and evidently with the greatest difficulty.

"We give you a hearty welcome, Monsieur le Prefect," de Clamorgan said ironically. It was not nobly done. But the old aristocrat was terribly rasped by the stupendous miscarriage of his careful plan—undone and balked because he had employed a tool even finer than he had supposed any human tool could be. And under such turbulent harrow not every perfect gentleman can behave perfectly—always.

Laurette winced a little, and so did Brochard. A gentleman may be allowed an inconsistent vulgarity now and a far again; but a gentlewoman may have no lapse in breeding, and a priest should have none.

The others were frankly amused, and Armand not least so.

"Pardon his apparent rudeness, Marquis," he said gleefully. "He is unable to answer you."

"Untruss your bird," de Clamorgan said brutally. "Four loyal man can deal with one regicide."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE WORM TURNS

DE MORLÈVE brought a chair, and de Trevières unswathed the fat mummy, unwinding and pulling off the endless cloak, and lowering the shrouding collar. The prisoner's face could be seen now, and that he was solidly gagged.

Between them they thrust him down into the seat.

"There," Armand said laughing, "let us allow him to speak!" and, suiting action to word, he pulled out the gag.

The Prefect exploded—for all the world like a cork popping from a bottle. "Sacré dieu!" he cried, half in rage, half in surly gratitude, "that was not a moment too soon. I am nearly suffocated."

"You will be glad to get the use of your arms too," Armand said, not unkindly, and beginning to cut the cords that had bound him up like a mummy or an over-trussed Christmas turkey.

Orsanelli still wore, of course, the bumptious uniform of his office. As de Trevières cut, the knife slipped and slithered, slashing the big Republican tricolor into ribbons and rags. "How careless I am." the Royalist said with a mock gesture of penitence.

But the Prefect was past caring either for a ribbon bauble of office or for Royalist mocking. He rose stiffly to his feet, rubbed his arms, then his legs, stretched out his long arms, flinching a little. "Ah!"

he said huskily, "what a relief! Where am I?" he added, looking about him curiously, and blinking comically. "In a cellar?"

"That need not concern you," de Clamorgan told him. "It is enough for you to know that you are our prisoner, and that escape is impossible."

"But," Orsanelli retorted, with a badly assumed and greatly exaggerated tone of joviality, "I have not the slightest wish to give you the slip—no such intention, none whatever. The Chevalier of the Purple Mask has already offered to release me for a ransom of ten thousand livres. I have refused," he concluded pompously.

Armand de Trevières was studying the man intently. There was something here that he did not understand, and he intended that it should not baffle him much longer.

"So!" de Clamorgan said to the Prefect. "And if I were to make you the same offer?"

"I should still refuse." Orsanelli said it quietly —almost with something of dignity. On the whole he was showing to better advantage as a prisoner than he had as a Prefect in full power, and de Trevières began to wonder if there was not something more in the fellow than he had thought.

"Come, come," urged the Marquis, frankly surprised, but not convinced. "To you the sum is a mere bagatelle——"

"Perhaps—perhaps not!" Orsanelli interjected.

"Nothing whatever to you. Your incarceration is depriving Bonaparte and the Eure of your distin-

guished services. And, too, we cannot with every desire to do so, make you comfortable here. Here are pen and paper to your hand. Write an authority on your bankers, couched safely for us, of course, or a note to Madame Orsanelli—she is in Paris, I know —and in two hours you shall go free."

The Prefect smiled enigmatically, but he made no other reply.

He had been craven under fear. In actual defeat he seemed far manlier.

Equality! Freedom! Fraternity! They are fine words. And even as catchwords their ring was enormous, its inspiration electric, wide, deep. Many of its human mouthpieces were despicable, not a few were ridiculous. But under the buffoonery and the blood-guilt ran a clear thread of high aspiration, an aim at selflessness and an undercurrent of spiritual ideal as indisputable and as admirable as were the loyalties, the sacrifices, and the devout convictions of the dwindling ranks of the hard-pressed Royalists.

Spluttering, pompous and craven, at the Prefecture at Evreux Orsanelli had been a figure of fun, and more contemptible than funny. On the tedious journey from the Eure to the Rue de Richelieu he had been a monster of fear and of comedy. De Vivonne and de Morsanne will laugh at the memory until their sides ache, as long as they live. But here, clutched tight in what he readily sensed was the veriest stronghold of Royalist force and cunning, escape palpably impossible, tied up but now

like a dead Egyptian or meat less distinguished, his deadliest foes thick—and none too considerate—about him, his splendid sash, insignia of Republican office, tattered and slashed from the insolent knife of his Royalist captor, his back up against the bleak wall of this cellar prison, he seemed to have found manhood again. He was not a brave man, the Citizen captive, but Bonaparte meant a great deal to him, and so did the Republic. He was Fouché's servant—but a far better man than the master. For this was no turncoat. A common man and a regicide—but, as regicides go, something sincere, something honest.

All of which Armand de Trevières began to suspect, and Brochard. None of which was suspected by Monsieur de Clamorgan.

The ungainly fat fish wished to be played, the Royalist leader thought, and proceeded to do it. He argued and tempted.

But the Republican stood firm.

"It is your only way out," de Clamorgan said at last testily. "And yet you persist in your refusal. What does it mean?"

"Merely," the reply came, "that it does not please me to allow my money to be used in the Royalist cause."

CHAPTER XXVII

IN ANOTHER MAN'S CLOTHES

AND something in his tone told them all that he meant it.

But still the Marquis played his own hand. He held good cards, and one of his strengths, both as a conspirator and a man (and he had many), was that he had in large measure the bulldog quality of tenacity—usually considered more British than Latin—of neither recognizing nor accepting defeat.

"And yet we shall force you to do so—sooner or later," he told Orsanelli.

"I doubt that," their prisoner said stoutly.

And again they were all impressed that he meant it.

"Monsieur Orsanelli," de Clamorgan warned him gravely, "I will give you four hours to reflect. At the end of that time you will give me your final answer."

Orsanelli shrugged his cumbrous shoulder cumbersomely. "You are too good," he said with an awkward attempt at persiflage—it is not a Republican deftness—"four hours! It is good! But, in the meantime, I am famished. I have not eaten since last night. Perhaps you will offer me breakfast, since my intrusion here is none of my own doing?"

De Clamorgan bowed ironically—yet too with something—a very little something—of the inevit-

able hospitality of his caste, which must offer its bread to the stranger within its château gates, welcome or ill-come. "How can you ask such a question?" he rebuked, gathering up all the papers on the desk—there was nothing else tell-tale lying about loose and unlocked. "This morning we can refuse you nothing."

Armand laughed. "My faith! now that you mention it, me also, I have eaten nothing since yesterday."

"Forgive me for not having thought of it," de Clamorgan said contritely. "Laurette, will you take the Chevalier into the——"

"Ah, no!" de Trevières interposed quickly. "If Monsieur Orsanelli does not object; I will breakfast in his company."

"Oh, I shall be honored," the Prefect said sarcastically.

And the Marquis, understanding that de Trevières had some quick-witted object, made no protest.

"Then, Mademoiselle," Armand said, going up to the girl, "will you be good enough to lay a cover for me also?" He knew that the question was needless, but to ask it enabled him to draw near her, speak to her, look into her eyes, make her speak to him. And out of just such slight materials as this does Love weave his strong bridges—weave, not hammer—delicate, silken bridges, but strong, very strong—the bridges he throws from the desire of to-day to to-morrow's attainment. Love is a skillful mechanic.

But Laurette made no answer, unless a little smile answered him.

"May I help you?" he begged, following her to the sideboard. Eugène Lavernais had well-nigh buried himself under countless ridiculous yards of gold braid that he might touch, the Saints willing, the girl's pretty fingers. Crockery and crystal would answer as well.

Brisk steps began to come and go overhead. Baptiste was putting the shop in order. And Constance and Irene would come in an hour. Orsanelli looked up at the ceiling with an odd smile—almost as if he understood.

"A hearty appetite and a pleasant meal!" de Clamorgan said—it might have been to either guest or to both—as he followed Madame de Grisolles up the stairs and into the upper world.

"You are an excellent table-maid," Laurette told de Trevières demurely.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he retorted, "I have had to wait on myself for a long time now—and eat alone usually. It's very dull often."

"Shall I make you an omelette?" she asked.

"Yes, if you please—another time, when I need share it with no one, unless—with you," Armand said quickly. And as he spoke his hand just brushed, feather-light, against hers.

"Monsieur!" Laurette exclaimed sharply. But she exclaimed at the stranger, and not at the small accidental liberty the fingers of Armand de Trevières had taken.

De Trevières followed her eyes.

"N'importe!" he whispered. "Let him look! It is well he should assure himself how strongly he is jailed."

Orsanelli had risen and was examining the stone walls minutely. He tapped them here and there with inquisitive fingers.

"Yes," de Trevières said, strolling toward him. "It is solid stone."

"Yes," the Prefect returned dryly. "I see it is. We are in a series of cellars, are we not?"

"You seem interested," was all the reply the Comte gave him.

"I am naturally of a curious disposition," Orsanelli said significantly. "A strange dwelling," he continued, peering sharply into the shadows on the other side of the tiny barred window. "Gloomy but extremely strong. A very difficult place to break into," he said with a shrug and a grimace.

"And still more difficult to break out of!" de Trevières reminded him good-naturedly. "But come! Our food is waiting." He turned to Laurette. "Don't let us keep you, Mademoiselle! We will wait on ourselves. You are very, very kind to have troubled."

The girl brushed that aside with a smile "If you want anything just call me," she said. And she left them, but not going, as the others had, upstairs. She passed through the dark arch into the passage beyond.

Orsanelli had already seated himself. But de

Trevières followed her to the entrance, and stood looking after her into the dark till her light steps died away. Then he returned to the table and seated himself at it *tête-à-tête*.

"That young girl is really charming," Orsanelli said thickly through a mouthful of radish and roll.

Armand de Trevières paid no attention.

"Is she the daughter of the old man?" the Prefect persisted.

"No!" de Trevières told him curtly.

"Ah, your fiancée, perhaps?"

"My fiancée! Ah, no!" De Trevières spoke abruptly, displeased at the liberty the other took to speak so of Laurette. Yet, even so, an undercurrent of pleasure rang through the hauteur of his tone. Laurette—little Laurette—his fiancée! In spite of himself he almost smiled.

"Then perhaps she is engaged to the funny-looking, thin, scrawny man?"

That was too much! "Most certainly not!" Armand snapped. "And I will trouble you not to discuss the lady!"

"Oh, no offense! No offense!" Orsanelli said coolly. "I was talking but for the sake of saying something."

"Or to make me say something," de Trevières said slyly.

Orsanelli ate in silence for a time, and Armand, hungry too, followed that example.

But the silence was not a long one, for each was

in truth anxious to make the other talk, and talk imprudently.

Orsanelli began first. "When I leave here, I shall be able to recognize you," he said significantly.

"*If* you leave here," de Trevières retorted.

The Prefect dismissed that hint with a grim laugh. "But I am not the only one who would be able to recognize you," he reminded the Comte. "Captain Lavernais, the servants, soldiers, gendarmes——"

De Trevières interrupted him with a laugh. "Yes, you had quite a crowd at Evreux waiting to welcome me, hadn't you? One would almost fancy that I had been expected."

"You were expected!"

"Eh?"

"You were expected. Nothing escapes the vigilant eye of Brisquet!"

"Brisquet?" the Comte exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that the police knew I intended to kidnap you?"

"They knew everything—the place, the day, the hour!" the Republican said proudly.

De Trevières considered the surprising news with an odd chuckle. Somehow, he did not doubt its truth. Nor was he as dumfounded as his companion had expected. "Hm!" he said grimly. "That would explain many things. But," he added suddenly, and with anxious compunction—the anxiety and the compunction were beautifully done—"you are drinking nothing!" And he filled his prisoner's glass again —the fourth time, to be exact.

"Thanks. I am indebted to your courtesy," Citizen Orsanelli said, lifting his big glass nothing loath. "Your health!" he added—and, under all the circumstances, magnanimously—raising his glass.

Armand de Trevières only touched his own wine, put down the goblet, and sat scrutinizing his vis-à-vis intently, a queer smile just hinting on his face.

"What are you looking at?" Orsanelli said uneasily.

"The sleeve of your coat," was the odd reply.

"My sleeve?" the citizen said uncomfortably, and hiding his arm quickly behind the table as well as he could.

"It is rather short, isn't it?" de Trevières drawled whimsically.

"It *is* a little short, as you say," Orsanelli admitted, shifting uneasily in his chair.

"Republican tailors know nothing of their trade," the Comte commiserated contemptuously. "Your whole uniform fits you extremely badly. Shockingly!"

"Oh, do you think so?" Orsanelli grumbled, fidgeting with his feet now!

"One would almost say," Armand de Trevières answered him very deliberately—each word a prick—and his eyes riveted on Orsanelli's—"that you were wearing clothes that had been made for someone else!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

"TO HER I LOVE!"

CITIZEN ORSANELLI took a hasty gulp of wine, and then said splutteringly, "Oh—er, —oh—er—it is an old uniform."

De Trevières laughed lightly. "But you are not eating!" he cried in sudden consternation, heaping good things again on the other's plate, and filling too his glass. "Let me give you a wing of this chicken. It looks delicious."

"It is delicious," Orsanelli said promptly, with his mouth full of it.

Armand raised his glass gallantly. "To the health of Madame Orsanelli!" he cried.

Orsanelli chuckled. "Thanks—thanks," he said, seemingly highly amused at something. But he was all there with the wine. "A toast in return!" he said, "To her you love!"

"Ah"—Armand Comte de Trevières rose to his feet. He lifted his goblet with a superb gesture and held it high. "To her I love!" he said gayly, gravely—his eyes on the archway's dark, a tender smile on the handsome mouth. "To her I love!" he said it again softly, and emptied the glass—drained it of its last drop.

"I wager that she is not far from here and that I have seen her!" Orsanelli was not tipsy—he was a trifle exhilarated.

De Trevières flushed angrily. Then he laughed. What did it matter? And he had brought it on himself! And, too, Orsanelli had given him an opening he wanted. He had a theory—a suspicion rather; he was probing it; and the ill-fitting coat proved very little—by itself it proved nothing. Republican tailors *were* botchers, most of them. And the good citizen was of a build peculiarly adapted to ill-fitting.

So—he laughed again, and said gayly, "Oh! you are quite mistaken," drawing a small miniature from his pocket. For a moment he gazed at the pictured face sentimentally, and then he passed it, with a slightly embarrassed smile (the pretty embarrassment and self-consciousness of the lovesick) to his companion, saying proudly, "Look! That is her portrait!"

Orsanelli examined it closely—but not half so attentively as the Comte de Trevières studied Citizen Orsanelli.

"A beautiful woman!" the Prefect said warmly.

"Charming, isn't she?" Armand's voice sounded highly pleased. And he was.

"I have never seen so charming a face," the Prefect said cordially, while Armand was filling his glass.

"Never?" de Trevières caught him up quickly. "Are you quite sure?"

"Absolutely," Orsanelli insisted stoutly over the rim of his glass.

"But look at it carefully," Armand persisted. "Are you sure you do not know that face?"

"Quite positive!" the Prefect reiterated. He understood fully—in spite of the wine—that the other was trying to trap him—it was a "catch who catch can" of wits between them now—that was quite understood—the Chevalier was trying to catch him, he was trying to catch the Chevalier. Well, the Chevalier could not catch him over this fair one, whoever she was! "Absolutely sure!" he repeated.

"Oh, ho! You are a droll fellow, Monsieur Orsanelli," Armand laughed teasingly, pointing a long, mocking finger at the other. And Orsanelli blinked at the jester rather stupidly, dazed by the food he had eaten voraciously quite as much as by the wine he had quaffed with small stint. "Why, it is really *you* who know this lovely lady—not *I,* mon cher Prefect!"

"I?" grunted the gourmand.

"Why, naturally!" Armand retorted in boisterous triumph. "Since I found it when I was searching you, in the inside pocket of your waistcoat—that prefectorial waistcoat that fits you so badly!" And he swayed in his chair with laughter.

Orsanelli dropped his fork with a clatter, and slunk down into his chair, limp with consternation. The citizen's wits were coarse but not altogether dull, and, in spite of the heavy meal he'd been eating —and drinking, he began to suspect what was coming.

But he made a bluff for it. "What do you mean?" he said, the personification of innocence and candor —somewhat nonplussed.

De Trevières laughed irrepressibly. His mirth bubbled up like wine in a cup, or the gush of some turbulent brook. "Oh, ho!" he cried. "How you are droll! Oh, ho!"

The Prefect sprang up now. This was indignation.

His tormentor found this the funniest yet. "Name of the devil!" he gasped between gurgles of laughter, "What a mystery you make about a trifle. Tut—tut—man, you've no cause to be ashamed! She's positively lovely. *Ma foi.* I congratulate you. Mon Dieu," he ended with a sentimental sigh, "and I envy you too!"

Orsanelli threw the miniature down on the table violently.

"Keep it!" Armand remonstrated amicably, "Keep it! It is yours, not mine."

Orsanelli shot him an evil look from under red, ruffled brows, hesitated an instant, and then pocketed the picture surlily, and turned on his heel—thought better of that, wheeled around and confronted Armand furiously, banging on the table with a red, hairy fist, a bang with each word. "Monsieur le Chevalier," he demanded—his tone more that of policeman than prisoner—"what are you driving at? What is your game?"

Armand measured him coolly. "It is not my game," he said slowly, "but yours!"

"What do you mean!" Orsanelli snapped.

"I will tell you," de Trevières answered crisply. "The great Fouché, Prefect of Police, is a devilish

clever fellow; but he has made one important mistake; he forgot to remember that the Purple Mask is a devil of a brainy fellow too," and he ended on a ripple of swallowed amusement.

"I do not follow you," Orsanelli lied—for he began to follow only too well.

De Trevières sat down leisurely, lifted his glass, studying the lamp's light through its ruby. "You say," he explained carelessly, "that he knew that I intended to kidnap you at Evreux—the time, the place, the hour. Now, in his place, what would I have done? I should have hit on an ingenious plan. Would you like to know it?"

CHAPTER XXIX

"BECAUSE IT WOULD BE A CRIME!"

AT that point the Citizen Orsanelli ceased to beat about the bush. He was too keenly interested to keep up his clumsy subterfuge any longer. And in answer to Armand's question, "Would you like to know what my plan would have been?"

"Immensely!" he said frankly, reseating himself also.

"I should have called one of my cleverest detectives," de Trevières said in the tone of one thinking it out as he spoke—"that famous Brisquet, for instance, of whom they talk so much. And I should have said to him"—Orsanelli was growing strangely

interested, intense with interest—" 'Brisquet, my friend, the Purple Mask is going to kidnap the Prefect of the Eure. Now I propose that *you* take a hand in this affair' "—he put down his glass, and across the table the eyes of the two men clashed. " 'I propose that Orsanelli shall remain quietly hidden in Paris' "—the listener drank his wine up suddenly—" 'and that you disguise yourself, put on one of his uniforms,' "—a wicked glance here at the sleeve—" 'proceed in his place to Evreux, and there lie in wait for the Chevalier.' That is what *I* should have done, Citizen Orsanelli,"—he worked to his climax rapidly now, his eyes dancing like some mischievous schoolboy's—"had I been the great Fouché! Don't you think my plan," he cried, leaning suddenly over the table, his right hand raised and outstretched, "an excellent one, Monsieur *Brisquet?*"

Brisquet dodged.

But Armand was the quicker. One flick of his wrist—it had not its match for rapier-play in all Europe—one swoop of his big white fingers, and "Orsanelli," unwigged and infuriated, was revealed and transformed: Brisquet indeed.

The detective sprang up in his wrath, a table knife in his hand—a ridiculous dagger enough—but deadly, good steel and well sharpened. He lunged with it straight for the breast of the Comte.

Armand de Trevières was laughing gleefully—good-natured, unperturbed. But he was watching his enemy narrowly, and as the big hairy hand lurched, the Royalist's fingers pinched on the wrist

with a grip that made the big policeman wince, and the dinner knife clatter down on a glass, shivering the delicate crystal, spilling the few drops of wine, red beads on the damask.

"Tut! Tut! Useless and clumsy!" de Trevières mocked. "Keep that good couteau for your poulet." Then he called loudly. "Come, my friends!" His voiced clanged and rang through the old subterranean place like a bugle. "Come! Come all of you! I pray you!

"We have scored another trick," he proclaimed, as they trooped in, Laurette and de Morlève running, the other older three more slowly.

"What is it?" Laurette spoke first. She had reached his side soonest.

"What is the matter?" de Morlève asked.

Madame de Grisolles, the Abbé, de Clamorgan waited to hear, and without speaking. And Brochard half suspected what was coming.

"Look at this man!" de Trevières told them triumphantly. "This is not Orsanelli. This is Brisquet!"

"Brisquet!" they all exclaimed except only Brochard.

"The redoubtable Brisquet," Armand nodded gayly—"Brisquet without his false hair! Fouché's famous detective—oh, ho! what a misfortune for the terrible Brisquet! He has taken Orsanelli's place in order to capture the Chevalier of the Purple Mask at Evreux. Poor, poor Monsieur Brisquet—the prince of police—the Republican lion—I turned

the tables on him—it was shabby of me! was it not? —and captured him instead—oh, ho! oh, ho!"

The Abbé smiled, and so did de Morlève, partly in appreciation of the good point scored for the Royalist cause, partly in sympathy for the contagious, rollicking mirth of the irrepressible daredevil. But de Clamorgan crossed the room slowly and demanded gravely of the prisoner, "Is this true?" And Madame de Grisolles saw, and was puzzled to see, that the Marquis was ill-pleased.

"It is useless to deny it," Brisquet retorted tartly, with an unfriendly shrug of his shoulders.

"Monsieur Brisquet," the Marquis told the detective coldly, "you have played for high stakes. You have lost and must pay." Inwardly the Royalist leader was raging—and the Abbé, Valentine, and de Morlève saw it. But he had no mind to show his hand to Fouché's sleuth-hound.

"What do you mean, Citizen Majolin?" the detective said uneasily.

"You will know only too soon," Majolin le Marquis told him grimly. "Take away the prisoner," he ordered curtly. He was anxious to get the fellow bundled off, out of ear-reach or eye-shot. He was boiling with ill-suppressed anger, and he knew that he could not suppress it much longer. And boil over before this peasant of an enemy he must not. "To a cell!" he said sharply.

De Morlève touched Brisquet on one arm, de Trevières laid a friendly hand on the other. He never could entirely help rather liking any one he

had worsted. "Come on, my dear Orsanelli!" he said affectionately.

Brisquet snorted. "Take care, Papa Majolin," he said ominously, "Fouché will know how to avenge me!"

Valentine de Grisolles took just a step towards the angry Republican. She looked now what she was, a queenly beautiful aristocrat. But her costume was exactly what it had been two nights ago when Fouché had examined her, and Brisquet himself had pronounced her passport quite in order. She still wore the same stone-colored gown, short-waisted, short puffed-sleeved, clinging long skirt, cut in one, untrimmed, except for the white fichu that was decency rather than trimming. Her filet-bound hair was identically dressed. Her only change was a change of manner.

"We are not afraid of Fouché," she told Fouché's henchman, indescribable scorn in her voice and in her haughty patrician face.

"That is a pity," Brisquet snarled—"for you, Citizeness." Yes, he was certainly braver here under defeat complete and particularly humiliating than he had been at the head of his army in his fortress-prefecture of Evreux.

"Come, come, my dear friend," Armand de Trevières urged him hurriedly, a cordial push of the hand on his elbow. "You will be none the worse for a wash. And your hair, I fear I have disarranged it somewhat, clumsy that I am! And your disguise no longer becomes you. That beautiful

wig was the best of it!" and laughing, half pushing, half pulling, he dragged the indignant Brisquet, disheveled indeed, through the open archway out of sight, but not for some time out of hearing, de Morlève smilingly aiding and abetting the more boisterous and more muscular Chevalier, though indeed Monsieur le Baron de Morlève was not meanly muscled.

And when they were all gone, the Republican prey and his titled jailers, de Clamorgan let his pent-up rage burst its dam, and spread itself in gesture, explosion and expletive. Laurette and Valentine had never seen him in such a fury before, and the Abbé Brochard only once. He was beside himself. His nostrils quivered. He walked up and down the room, tearing his passion to tatters. And when he threw himself down in a chair, at last, exhausted by his own exasperation, Valentine saw that there were tears in his eyes—the hot, stinging tears of Gallic rage.

"Ten thousand devils!" he cried—and half-sobbed, "What a disaster!"

The women looked at him askance, and Laurette shrank back a little.

But the priest came towards him, and spoke soothingly, but too with something of the authority of his sacred office. "Disaster?" he said incredulously, in a tone to "sprinkle cool patience upon the heat and flame" of the seething man's distemper. "Disaster! when we have our most dangerous enemy

in our power!" But he had sprinkled with gunpowder.

De Clamorgan sprang up again, infuriated anew, almost inarticulate with rage and disappointment. "Brisquet!" he gibbered, stamping up and down, up and down, the little apartment, as if it had been a veritable cage and he entrapped in it. "Brisquet dangerous? Nonsense!" (And yet he himself had so called the detective but two nights ago.) "Oh! the imbecile! Traitor! This upsets all my plans. It is inconceivable. I am unconsolable—desolated! Brisquet was my trump card! I was counting on him to capture the false Chevalier before the fifteenth—whilst now——" He broke off because words were inadequate—broke off with a dramatic clenched fist shaken in anathema at the corridor through which Armand de Trevières had disappeared.

He broke off—but almost before he did little Laurette interrupted him sternly. She intercepted him in his excited striding, confronted him squarely, and demanded haughtily, coldly, "Uncle! You are not going to send the Comte de Trevières to his death a second time!"

"That is exactly what I intend to do," de Clamorgan told her with a coldness colder than her own icy scorn wreathed on his thin lips, icy determination arrogant in his eyes.

"Impossible!" the girl exclaimed desperately—and at her tone Valentine de Grisolles sent Brochard

a sudden look and the priest avoided its message—"Oh!" the child sobbed, "it is impossible!"

"And why, pray?" Madame de Grisolles demanded unwisely, but it was not unkindly meant. Her desire was to get between the girl's growing excitement and the cruel words that she could see frothing to de Clamorgan's lip—"Why, Laurette?"

Laurette drew herself up proudly, and answered imperatively. "Because," she said, "it would be a crime."

CHAPTER XXX

"YOU LOVE ME!"

IT would be a crime!" the girl repeated—the Abbé sighed at what her tone betrayed—he had suspected it!—"It would be a treachery, a peasant meanness, a stain for ever on the King's cause! It is not by such foul falseness that the Bourbon can be served!"

"Silence!" thundered her uncle, almost demented at her words. "What has this to do with you, child? Have you so soon forgotten your lesson? The Cause! The Cause before everything!"

But he knew now what it had to do with her. He had lived long, and had lived much. He was a wise old man. And at the revelation she had made his tired old heart bled for the child he had loved and succored from her cradle.

And the Abbé knew. (He had known first of all.) And the Comtesse de Grisolles knew.

Valentine de Grisolles had done with love and with hate. She had in herself but one passion, one possibility of passion, one activity of heart or pulse: the Bourbon. But she *had* loved, as a woman; and what woman ever forgets it—nun in her cell, condemned on the scaffold, or crone in her dotage? She had loved once, and her heart yearned over Laurette.

The Abbé Brochard had closed his eyes for a moment. The Abbé was praying. Yes, they all knew—all but Laurette!

Laurette did not know—yet. She moved away from the others coldly, and sat down forlornly on the stairs, her angry blue eyes on the dark passage. And as she watched, waiting, she began to cry softly.

"Now!" de Clamorgan said more calmly. "Listen! Listen all of you!"

They gathered about him—all but Laurette.

"Before this meddling swashbuckler returns——"

"You sent for him," Laurette broke in under her breath. And the Abbé Brochard actually said it aloud.

The old Marquis waved that aside. "We must leave here at once. Immediately! First, I will get rid of de Trevières. Then, when you are all safely on your way, I will release Brisquet."

Laurette looked up oddly, and the Comtesse and the priest were both amazed.

". . . will release Brisquet," the Marquis re-

peated firmly, "put him on the track of the sham Chevalier—oh! I shall know how to come to terms with M. the Citizen Brisquet, have no fear—and make straight myself for my little place at St. Cloud! Hush! They are coming."

And they certainly were. And the meddler—the unlucky swashbuckler—was singing, in taunting adieu to Brisquet in the cell they were leaving:

> "Quand Robespierre reviendra,
> Tous les jours deviendront des fêtes."

He was humming still when he came in arm-in-arm with de Morlève.

"Monsieur!" the Abbé called Raoul, and after a word in the young man's ear they two passed up the stairs, and after a moment Valentine followed them. She said something to the girl as she passed her. But Laurette shook her head, annoyed and not to be influenced.

Armand de Trevières raised his eyebrows drolly —"Exodus!" he said to himself. Why? And what had the Comtesse said to little Miss Chateaubriant —there on the stairs ?

"Well," de Clamorgan said to him, looking up courteously, "is your prisoner safe?"

"Safely bestowed in his cell." Hello! So Laurette was going too! Where was she going? Into the dark corridor. And why so very, very quietly. "Altogether safe, Monsieur de Clamorgan —locked, at your disposal. And now I will say

good-by, Marquis. When you need me again, you will let me know."

"Must you leave us again so soon, Comte?" the Marquis protested, trying his utmost to do it cordially, not to show the relief he felt. Really this was luck.

Armand de Trevières smiled—a little superciliously, but he answered naturally and quite cordially, "I am tired and very sleepy, Monsieur. If you will excuse me, I will catch a few hours' sleep while I can, for I hope you will soon have another mission for me."

"Very soon," the Marquis said, easily cordial now. "You are very wise, Monsieur. Bon repos! I have another mission for you and at once."

"Good! Good!" de Trevières cried heartily.

"Drink another glass of wine, my dear fellow," the Marquis begged, "while I prepare your instructions. I shall only keep you a few moments."

De Trevières bowed his thanks—as the Marquis bustled out. And whistling the lilting tune he had hummed but now—"Quand Robespierre reviendra"—he sat nonchalantly down on the table, damask, and dishes, and all. Pouring out a glass of wine he held it up to the light, whistling softly to himself. Suddenly he put down the glass with a quiet laugh.

What was that?

A girlish voice—yes, and a pair of blue eyes, at the little square, grated window.

"Monsieur de Trevières," she whispered.

He flew to her. "Ah, Mademoiselle," he told her significantly, "I was hoping you would come!"

"Listen," she said earnestly, "I have only a moment."

"Then be gracious to a wandering wayfarer, just off again to his fray, and come into this room, or permit me that I come to you. These bars—they—they embarrass me."

"There's not a moment to lose," she insisted.

"There's always time to be kind," he pleaded.

Laurette hesitated, just for an instant, and then she slipped from the little wine cellar, out into the dark passage, and back into the room—the Abbé's refuge.

"We must be very quick," she told him, before he could speak. "This new mission which my uncle will confide to you——"

"Yes?" He came closer to say it, his eyes eating her face.

For one fraction, one smallest fraction of one second, her voice faltered, and then she met his eyes firmly, and said earnestly, "I implore you not to accept it."

"Why not?" The man's voice trembled as he asked it, and his heart leaped in his ribs.

Laurette parried. Her uncle had been very good to her always. "You have succeeded in your first attempt," she said lamely. "You will not have the same good fortune always."

"Mademoiselle!" he cried in grief-stricken reproach. "Ciel! what a blow to my pride!" His

voice was abject and dejected, but his eyes were dancing, and the blood in his veins. "Have you already lost your belief in me?" His tone was caress and entreaty.

"Oh, do not laugh, Monsieur!" she begged him. "You do not understand. This is deadly serious. Terribly! In truth it is——" Emotion was surging up pitifully, almost overwhelming her.

Armand de Trevières came still nearer. "Mademoiselle," he said very tenderly, his voice warm with devotion, quiet with deference, "what is troubling you?"

"Oh," Laurette said piteously, and the eyes she lifted in entreaty to his were all swimming in tears, "I cannot explain—only, please, please, believe me —you must refuse to play the part of the Chevalier any longer."

His eyes kissed her. His arms ached for her. But he only said quietly, as gently as firmly, "Impossible! My word is pledged."

"Oh!" Laurette urged—in her eagerness she put out her little hands to lay hold of his arm in insistence and entreaty—then drew them back with a blush; and Armand de Trevières loved them for the distance they kept—"Oh, Monsieur, but it was given—your word—in ignorance of the truth—of the plot against you——"

"Plot?" he said oddly.

"Oh, what have I said?" Laurette sobbed in consternation. "Monsieur," she pleaded, "I cannot explain. I cannot betray my friends!"

"Then why are you here?" Armand de Trevières whispered—his hands knotted together painfully, lest they forget and take a tender liberty with the sweetness before him—the dear little girl in her little white gown, her adorable chin, arms, full of chinks made for kissing, bare from her short little puffed sleeves, and the tiny arched feet in their crossed ribboned sandals peeping out far more like mischievous baby angels than mice. De Trevières's nails cut into his hands. "Tell me, little Laurette," he whispered hoarsely, "why are you here?"

"Because I cannot see a brave man go to a treacherous death," she answered stoutly.

Armand de Trevières bit his lip.

"Mademoiselle," he said slowly, "you have said so much you must trust me, and tell me the whole story!" He waited for her reply, watching her with an agony in his eyes. Would she tell him? Would she betray her kinsman and her old friends to him? Would she? It meant more to him than anything had ever meant before—more than all the dear lilies, more than Bourbon—dead, living, unborn. How would Laurette de Chateaubriant answer him? —oh, dear Saints! it meant more to Armand de Trevières than anything had ever mattered before. It meant heaven or hell to Armand de Trevières. "Come," he whispered, with a look that should have told her his story, "you have done this brave thing for me. That makes me very happy. Little friend, you know you can trust me!"

And then—with her eyes in his—she gave him

her soul proudly but simply, saying, "Yes, I know I can." (She had given him her heart before!) "Yes. I know that! Your capture has been arranged."

And with those words she gave her honor into his keeping. He knew it—and there in the cellar he vowed to his God he would hold it and keep it forever white, spotless, dearer than life, ten thousand times dearer than self. She had crossed woman's terrible, tempest-tossed Rubicon. She had betrayed her all-but-father to him. For him! And what this meant, what it proved, she a de Chateaubriant, every drop of blood in her delicate veins proud and invincibly loyal, he knew, and his heart cracked and cried with the torment of holding back what he must not say yet. Hot, passionate words poured to his lips, and tore at them for utterance. But he mastered them, and himself, for her young sake, and merely asked quietly, "By whom?"

"By my uncle," the girl whispered.

"Ah! But why?"

"Because it is necessary for the rescue of my father that the police should believe that they have the Chevalier safely in their hands before the fifteenth."

"I see!" de Trevières said—half to her, half to himself. "I see!" and he laughed to himself happily, a gay little puff-ball explosion of glee.

Laurette looked at him amazed. "How oddly you take it," she said. Almost she complained.

Smiling, as a man never smiles but at one woman, and not often at the one woman, Armand de Tre-

vières came very close to the girl, and just laid one touch of his fingers reverently on the lace filmed in her sleeve. "Little friend," he said softly, "I knew all this before."

"You knew" — she stammered — incredulous, baffled—"You knew it! And almost, Monsieur, almost it seems to please you."

And then love, man's passion, came into its own! But still he was gentle to her.

"It is what you have told me besides, that pleases me," he told her, his hand on her arm.

"What I have told you?"

"Not with your lips!" he cried, exultant, masterful, fond, "but with your eyes, your courage in daring to tell me so much—of your friends—of your uncle." He took his hand from her arm, and stepped away from her. She should give herself to him, he cried in his arrogant man's soul. He would not take! She should give! "Laurette!" he cried suddenly, "you love me!" And at the love that quivered, the triumph that sang, in his voice, the old room quivered, and the girl's blood sang in her heart.

CHAPTER XXXI

"THEY CALL IT LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT"

"YOU love me, Laurette!" he cried again, his arms stretched out to the slim, white-clad young thing—"Come! Come to where you belong!"

"Monsieur—I—I——" she stammered, glad, frightened, shy, proud, ashamed.

"I know it!" Armand exclaimed, half mad with triumph and joy, carried away by the hot life's wine in his veins. "I know it, my little Laurette. I can see it in your eyes. I—I too, Laurette, I who have never before known what it was to suffer a moment's trouble at the thought of a woman—I who took them all as part and parcel of life's gay adventure—to come, and to go, and to be forgotten—from the moment I saw you—the moment!—everything was changed—it was a new world—my heart stood still when I saw you, Laurette! I could think of nothing else—I have thought of nothing else since—I have seen nothing else. I—I—oh! in short, mignonne, I felt remarkably foolish—and when you gave me your hand to kiss—the little soft scrap of a thing—oh!—I felt so ridiculously happy. I—do you know what I wanted to do? I wanted to dance and to sing like a schoolboy. I—I——" and half laughing, half crying, he broke down, pausing for breath, choked with his own jubilant, riotous emotion.

"Give me your eyes!" he commanded. "Look at me, Laurette!"

And because she had to, she did, pale with happiness, shy as a dove.

"Laurette!" he cried softly, "do you know what they call this?"

"Call——" she stammered, blushing, and speaking at last, because he willed her to speak. He

wanted her voice, as he'd wanted her eyes. "Call —call what?"

"You——" he told her haltingly—but the girl understood him. "You—and I——"

She shook her head dreamily.

Very gently he told her. "They call it love at first sight." He held out his arms to her—without a word—save what his eyes said to hers—his eyes and the gesture itself.

This was their moment! The man's and the maid's! Out of all Eternity's time underlined for them by God's love.

For an instant she stood swaying a little, like some exquisite flower on its root, looking him full in the face, weighing him and her own heart. Then, with a little cry, like a bird to its nest, a child to its mother, a bride to her mate, the motherless girl slipped into his arms.

He put them about her tenderly, slowly. Very gently he put them about her. He put them about her forever. He held her close. He said nothing. For he must have sobbed had he spoken—the great fellow—motherless too—far too moved for words. He laid his face on her hair—crushing the trim little gauze-bound curls sadly. He ran his hands trembling a little along the soft stuff of her sleeve, the exquisite line of her arm.

This was their moment.

He cupped her soft young face in his strong hands, and he kissed her with his love in his eyes.

He kissed her in reverence. Then he kissed her

in worship—worshiping her rose-leaf face with his lips. Then he kissed her in love. And he kissed her again. . . .

"Laurette! Where is Laurette?" Madame de Grisolles called in the distance.

With a little cry half a laugh Laurette pulled from his arms and, looking up at him with shy, mirthful eyes, tidied her hair.

"Oh! forgive me," he said, "the poor, poor little curls!"

She dimpled and nodded.

"Have you anything more to tell me, Laurette? Quick, dear one!"

"Yes," she said rapidly, "Brisquet! They will release him to trap you!"

"So!" Armand whistled. "But what of this hiding-place? He will betray them all!"

"No," Laurette said, "we leave here at once. My uncle has it all planned, perfectly."

De Trevières nodded. "Ah! I see! Where do *you* go?"

"To our house at St. Cloud."

"Listen, then, mignonne! You will see me again on the fifteenth, at the rescue of your father!"

Laurette gestured her amazement, and looked it too.

"Ah! yes," Armand told her emphatically. "Believe me. I know the plans of Monsieur le Marquis our uncle." He chuckled softly. "And I know, too, the plans of Monsieur le Comte, your 'pretender,' Mademoiselle de Chateaubriant, Madame la Com-

tesse de Trevières!" bending before her, elaborate Court-fashion—"believe me, I shall have, too, a finger in that pie—the monstrous fine pâté to be cut on the fifteenth, at the rescue. You see, you cannot get rid of me. You can never get rid of me again—never while we both live! I shall be on in the act, as the player-folk say—the climax act of the rescue. But if, in the meantime, I can get a chance to see you, I will."

At that moment de Clamorgan came silently along the passage beyond the arch. He saw them. They neither saw nor heard him. He paused for a moment, and then noiselessly slipped into the little cellar into which the barred window opened. He stood close to that window, but well in the shadow, watching and listening.

"Where is your house?" Armand asked.

"The Villa Montaigne," Laurette told him promptly. "A small country house outside St. Cloud."

The old eavesdropper smiled grimly. This suited well with his plan, and he had lived too long and too much, his own youth had been too vibrant, to be greatly surprised, or shocked in the least, by a love treachery. Laurette—and he loved her—was storing up sharp suffering for herself—but—ah! well!—that was her part, her contribution—what mattered her pain?—he too had suffered—nothing mattered—mattered?—nothing *was*, but the Cause; and suffering was the crest of her caste, the cachet of all privileged to be the servants of the Bourbon.

"Good!" de Trevières said swiftly. "And if you wish to communicate with me before the fifteenth, send to my lodgings here in Paris; 17 Rue de Grâce. Address the letter to Citizen Poiret——"

Laurette repeated it twice—not to forget it, "17 Rue de Grâce"—and de Clamorgan smiled again, and slipped noiselessly back into the dark passage, as Valentine de Grissoles called once more, "Laurette! Laurette! Where are you?"

"Oh, the good Heaven!" the little girl whispered, and darted to the door. "Adieu, Monsieur," she flung over her shoulder.

He was after her hard, caught her by her shoulders lightly. "My name is Armand," he told her.

She hung her head.

"Say it!" he commanded, lifting the sweet, shy face in his palms.

"Adieu—Armand!" she whispered so low that he only just heard her.

"Au revoir," he corrected her, his face on her hands, "Au revoir, my little Laurette."

He let her go then, and she ran from the room.

Left alone, Armand de Trevières gave a big happy sigh, turned back to the table—the darkness had swallowed her up—lifted his wine-glass high.

"Laurette!" he said, and he drained it: Love's Sacrament!

CHAPTER XXXII

"AU REVOIR, ALL!"

"FORGIVE me," de Clamorgan said, as he came bustling in, "I have kept you so long!"

"My time is all yours, and our King's," Armand said cordially. "I have been delighted to wait. Are we not comrades, you and I, Monsieur le Marquis, in the same Cause?"

Jean de Clamorgan winced a little at that. "To do a great right, do a little wrong," was no part of his creed. Treachery to a comrade, to do the greater loyalty to King Louis, did not come to him quite easily. But it had to be—was his duty, as he saw it. "Ah, yes," he said gravely, "the Cause! Here are your instructions, Monsieur de Trevières. They are sealed, and must not be opened until to-morrow morning. Forgive this secrecy. It is necessary, I assure you."

"I do not question it," the Comte said amicably. "Monsieur, I obey you implicitly."

He turned to go then, but at that moment the others returned, the Abbé de Morlève and Madame from above.

"Madame de Grisolles, Abbé," the Marquis told them, "the Comte is leaving us."

De Morlève passed back up the stairs, ready to open the trap. And Laurette slipped shyly in from the passage.

To each in turn—but not to the Marquis, he forgot to go to the Marquis—de Trevières went, hat in one hand, the other hand out in friendship.

They all looked—in spite of themselves—uncomfortable; even the Comtesse.

"Au revoir, my friends," de Trevières said blithely, holding out his hand first to the Abbé. Brochard took it—he had to—and then lifted his own in benediction. And he did it sincerely.

"Guard your prisoner well, Abbé," de Trevières charged him gayly. "He's a slippery fellow."

"But no match for us," the priest reassured him.

"Perhaps—as you say—my Father, not more slippery than you," Armand agreed lightly, and laughing good-humoredly.

"Au revoir, Madame," he said, bending over Valentine's hand.

"Au revoir?" she said coldly, her glance on a little crushed curl. "Do we meet again soon then, Monsieur?"

"Oh, I am sure of it. I am one of those slippery fellows too," he returned very gravely, "always bobbing up when least expected." He crossed to Laurette, and took her soft hands. "Au revoir, Mademoiselle," he said gently, "and a thousand thanks for your—kindness and hospitality. It has given me a new joy in life!"

Laurette scarcely spoke. She just murmured, "Au revoir, Monsieur le Comte," just lifted her blue eyes to his brown, but her hands fluttered—not unkindly—in his.

He crossed to the stairs and went up them, saying as he went, "Monsieur le Marquis, I trust you are satisfied with the work I have done for the Cause?" He had avoided the hand of de Clamorgan.

"Oh, quite," the Marquis answered quickly, "quite. My dear fellow, we are all deeply indebted to you for your brilliant capture of the redoubtable Brisquet."

"Oh," laughed de Trevières, "that is nothing; a mere bagatelle. I can do much better than that, I assure you. I am convinced that you will be much more deeply indebted to me—later on! Au revoir." He was going then; but he turned back. This old man, his treacherous host, was the uncle of Laurette de Chateaubriant—had sheltered, befriended her, cherished her childhood. And too—if he had stooped to an indirection, a treachery, of which he, Armand de Trevières, was incapable, even to a foe! —it was treachery in the King's cause, a meanness done in the service of Louis! De Trevières retraced his steps, and held out his hand to the Marquis.

And as de Clamorgan took it, the old aristocrat wished heartily that he need not sacrifice this fellow conspirator.

"Au revoir!" the adventurer said again to them all, at the head of the stairs, gripped the hand de Morlève offered, threw the blue eyes a look—and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

LES ESCARGOTS

PARIS was dancing.

She had been dancing ever since the Terror—dancing rather wildly for the most, blood-drunk, nerve-twisted. Can-can had ousted the minuet. And the street was her *place-de-danse*.

The bitter Puritanical days of the Revolution's sanguinary rule had been brief indeed—a bauble of class-hatred, never a trait of French blood. From the very first hour of the Directory anarchy, license and debauch, triplet furies, succeeded the grim bloodshed, terrible, hideous, accursed, but yet the deformed-from-its-birth child of conscience, conscience black, fetid, demented, but still conscience.

Paris soon renounced and eschewed a conscientiousness so ugly and ill-mannered—and rushed with a "houp-là" and a shrill carol of wanton laughter to amuse itself. Clubs sprang up like mushrooms. Every street corner had its gathering. The *salon* was as banished and gone as the Bourbon. Paris romped. Paris screamed. Wit hid her face, ashamed of the place that had been her perfectest temple. Refinement fled, or cowered with the Royalists in their cellars. Grace died with them on the guillotine. Frenzy reigned, and Excess was his mistress-in-chief.

The grim restraints of the dour Revolution days

had irked from the first, and almost from the first were thrown off with a mad joy of demented reaction.

This was the playtime of a people distraught and unnerved, unstrung and class-poisoned. In every quarter of the old city, in its very newer purlieu, games were played, routs held in the open. Dissolute pastimes predominated—and most of them as silly as ribald.

And in nothing did the wild reaction display itself so stripped to the waist, so sudden, so unashamed, as in the defiant debauchery of what had been France's loveliest art: dancing.

Wherever a scaffold had stood, the Parisians danced daily and nightly. They danced in the graveyards, décolletés—sans culotte, pirouetting on the very graves, lolling latitudinarianly on the tombs. They danced in the rain—in the open at first, shrieking with delight when the angry skies downpoured rebuke, washing the red and the blue from their tricolors, soaking the scant gauze dresses until women who had been decent once were as if naked, and so danced on, till they staggered.

Then the dance halls sprang up—not ousting the open-air danceries; supplementing and then jostling them. In the Elysée Nationale (as the Elysée Bourbon—perish the very name!—was renamed), the negro Julien led a great orchestra, beating the time that it throbbed out to the lewdest dancing in Europe. Clarinet, flute, violin and tambourine crashed, bellowed and rang wilder and wilder, and

faster and faster, and the feet of the dancers caught and kept up to its last wanton note the wild refrain.

A few hours after Armand de Trevières had left the Rue de Richelieu, an old woman, apple-faced, but wrinkled, stood on the edge of the crowd that was watching the dancers in the Tivoli gardens.

When Boutin—the Farmer-General—was executed for watering the nation's tobacco, his beautiful garden had been thrown to the rabble, renamed (they renamed everything in those red days of boisterous anger) and turned into a dance place. Paris had none more notorious.

The old dame watched her chance, and pushed nearer the dancers. She was looking for some one, searching for a face and a signal, but she did not betray that. Hers was a stolid old face—all but the bright, quick eyes—or looked so at least tonight, under her mob-cap of dark sarcenet. She appeared engrossed in the feet and the twinkling legs of the dancers. A basket, a cheap osier thing, but clean, hung on her arm, and she guarded it well.

"What have you there, mother," a soldier asked her jovially, "that you watch so closely?"

"Escargots," she said readily, raising the lid of her basket. Sure enough, on a clean napkin several dozen—three or four—escargots—fine, fat ones—were piled neatly—cool sprigs of parsley curled about and between them.

"Do you sell them?" he asked, his hand to his pocket.

"No," she told him, snapping her basket down,

but not impolitely. "I have bought them but now. My daughter is ill, and I shall make her a broth. She cried for escargots last night. I am on my way home; but old eyes need medicining sometimes, as much as young stomachs do, and old legs need resting oftener."

"Will you dance with me?" he demanded.

And she laughed at his joke, not unpleased, as it seemed. "I danced my last dance at the bridal of Death and le Citoyen Égalité," she replied, shaking her head—and secretly vowing a candle to a little shrine where a fleur-de-lys, cut of the richest velvet, bloomed winter and summer.

The man laughed, tossed a coin into her shawl, and seizing a half-dressed girl from the crowd, romped off with her into the dancing.

Presently Lucette saw a pair of smart feet—one sandal criss-crossed to its wearer's white stockings with green ribbon, its fellow criss-crossed with amber.

She looked up at the dancer. The girl was wearing a necklace of cherries—red ripe cherries—real ones—and a great bunch of violets in her cropped hair. Evidently one of the frail, the child—she was not much older than that—wore no rouge. An interesting pallor was the affectation just then of all who prided themselves on their fashion—mondaine or demi-mondaine. But her little coarse lips glittered with vermilion, and a cherry crushed in the dance ran red on her bosom. Her bodice had cost little or nothing in material. But only peasants,

nuns and very old women wore much in the way of bodice, in Paris, that year, not the Citizeness Joséphine herself or yellow-haired Hortense de Beauharnais.

The girl with the cherries wore her hair bobbed à la victime—the violets held on by a blood-red bandeau of ribbon. She wore a red shawl over her naked shoulders—a thin thing of spangled gauze—letting the white, powdered flesh gleam ghastly through its sheer delicate tissue. And a narrow red ribbon encircled her neck. All of this to mark her the daughter of parents who had died on the guillotine—a very chic thing to do then in the lower rungs of the ladder of Parisian fashion—but on Marie's part a pert affectation, since she never had known her parents or known who they were—she had come into the world, as she had lived, nameless. The red thread of ribbon at her throat represented the red kiss of the guillotine's knife, the red shawl was worn in memorial of the red shawl the executioner threw over the shoulders of Madame de St. Amarante, and of Charlotte Corday, when they went to the scaffold, as English sailors wear to this day a black neckerchief in perpetual mourning for Nelson.

They were dancing la danse à la victime, the girl and her fellows, jerking their heads sharply as they met in the turn of the measure, in imitation of the fall of the head in the basket of sawdust.

No pastime in Paris was more popular than "Le Bal des Victimes"—a function at which only this one terrible measure was trod, to which all who

came were, or affected to be, close kindred to at least one who had perished on the knife-fed scaffold. And at almost all such free dance frolics as this one was, "La Danse des Victimes" was sure to be danced once at least.

"Heaven" and "Hell" and "Red Windmill" pamper to just such abnormalities in Paris to-day, or they did yesterday. And *we* (in England) probably are no better and no worse than we were when woad and blue paint were our only wear.

As the dance dwindled the girl with the cherries came carelessly to old Lucette, and pointed to the basket.

"Sugar-plums or black pearls from the sea?" she said gayly.

"Black pearls from a garden," Lucette told her curtly.

"Escargots!" the girl cried. "Let me see!" And without waiting permission she seized on the basket, swung it twice lightly, smacked it against her svelte hip—"Will you trade?" she said saucily, holding out the slack of her necklace.

Lucette plucked a cherry, and bit it. "It is sour!" she said violently, when she had tasted—and threw it to the ground with a grimace.

The gamin-girl pretended to weep.

"Come, come," said the woman, relenting. "I'll try another." She pulled off one more, ate it with gusto. "Sweet as honey," she said.

The girl opened the basket. "One, two, three," she began. "How many, Madame?"

"Thirty-nine," Lucette told her.

"Spare me one? I love them so," and the darkened eyes gloated over the succulent dainties. "Only one!"

Lucette took up one of the snails, and held it out with a frown.

The dancer took it daintily, and then helped herself, very slowly, counting them aloud, to four sprigs of parsley.

"Au revoir—à bientôt," she said carelessly, as she ran back to her partner, her cherries dancing and dangling, the snail and the parsley crushed in her palms—the snail in her left hand, the green in her right.

"Au revoir—à bientôt," Lucette echoed, turning away indifferently, and slouching off—basket on arm.

Armand de Trevières had gotten his message through.

Indeed, he had both given and received. Lucette had sent orders, and she had garnered news. Snails, cherries, parsley, a basket lightly struck on a girl's hip—it all had meant something. The sour cherry rejected, the sweet cherry eaten, each syllable the two women, one so young and so frail, one so old and so staunch, had exchanged had been a word or a sentence in the code of the Royalist's telepathy.

The fantastic wearing of the cherries (forced and costly in May) had been a detailed signal. Tiny apples would have meant something else—artificial currants, a message still different. The fruit signals

were expensive—but clever, and safe. It was a dumb, wordless cypher, impossible to solve, de Trevières believed. And in that day of eccentric dressing, a woman of the town could wear, and often did, garniture far more extraordinary than a few dangling, ripe, red cherries.

And as Lucette trudged circuitously home, several times she stopped or was accosted to give or receive some signal anent his careful plan and elaborate preparation for the rescue of the father of Laurette.

But the Bretonne got home at last, and cooked them her supper. For de Vivonne and de Morsanne were waiting for her as well as Armand. And while they studied their map, and charted their relays, reënforcements, their friends and their foes, she bent over her fire, happy and proud, stewing escargots, frying the only thing in France's excellent larder that is more delicious still: the tender white legs of very young frogs.

"You'll get none in England!" de Trevières told her. "Neither the one nor the other. The snails are all bitter, and the frogs have no legs."

Lucette lifted her old brown hands high in disgust. "What a desolate country!" she said.

CHAPTER XXXIV

UNHEROIC

THE Marquis de Clamorgan was no waster of time. That same night they slept at St. Cloud —he and Laurette.

What bargain he made with Brisquet, or how he compassed it, not even Brochard heard. There was no time to spare for telling or hearing. It was pack up, and off with them all. But the bargain was made. When the shop was closed for the night, Madame, Raoul, and the priest were well on their way to the Bernadine Convent, and an hour later de Clamorgan and Laurette quietly started for St. Cloud. And just as the gay trio about Lucette's little table were tossing up to see which two should have the bed, and which one the hearth-rug, faithful Jacques let a chastened and anxious Brisquet out of the garden gate, to make his way unostentatiously across Paris, wondering wretchedly how he was to exculpate himself to Fouché. Fouché had small mercy on failure.

The moon came up at midnight, a chill, lemon moon. And the villa garden was bitterly cold.

Old Bastien shivered cruelly as he squatted beside the little artificial lake on to which one of Laurette's windows looked down. It was not a heroic picture he made, a shrunken, toothless French peasant, riddled by years, palsied with cold, gro-

tesquely wrapped in an old shawl—almost as ill-used by life as he—beating the water by which he knelt with a willow wand that his numbed old hand could scarcely hold.

He was beating the water to keep the frogs still, lest their discordant croaks should disturb the sleep of his lady, or even of his seigneur himself. And for hours, each night that either Laurette or the Marquis spent at St. Cloud, Bastien squatted just so, just here, beating the pond, terrorizing the frogs into silence.

Laurette was the soundest of sleepers. The Marquis slept on the other side of the villa. *And* in this tiny sheet of ornamental water there was never a frog. No, it was not a heroic figure!

But to some hearts the man and his absurd menial act were not without merit. And to one mind, at least, they had a dignity too, and even a beauty.

Bastien had been born a serf of the seigniorial house of Clamorgan. Revolution had taken his throne from the Bourbon. No Revolution can take his proud serfdom from a Bastien. For centuries his fathers had guarded the sleep of their seigneurs, in the old château of which the Terror had spared not a trace, had guarded it, beating the frogs of a great moat-like pond into abject silence. And no power, not the prayer of Laurette, not the command of the Marquis, could stay old Bastien from his obsessed service. His rheumy old eyes had filled with tears once when Laurette over-urged and the Marquis had threatened with a lump in his own

throat—and after that they had left him alone. It was his great joy. And only rheumatism or death would take it from him. No, it was not a heroic picture.

They had spoken of filling up the tiny water, but with an exquisite understanding, essentially French, they forbore. It would have been a brutality.

Of all the torture inflicted by the French Revolution, perhaps just such old family servants suffered the most. And if "the hand of little usage hath the daintier sense"—as indisputably it has—often the caste of simpler service has the more of heartache after a great social upheaval. God knows the Marquis de Clamorgan had suffered from the first scratch of Revolution's red, poisoned claw till now; and suffering and poison were his very blood now. He had borne and had seen what no reinstatement of Church or King could sponge away or atone. But, of the two, old Bastien's plight was the more unkind. If the Revolution had robbed and hurt de Clamorgan, and steeped him in catastrophe, also it had given him occupation and obsession. But Bastien's occupation was as gone as Othello's. His daily life was shattered. The Marquis was stripped of the power and the place that had meant not a little to him—but he had a good deal left, friends, books, music, a country to save from itself, a King to rethrone; no mean resource this; and he had in himself no mean equipment for industrious and successful use of that resource. The serf was stripped of his master's insignia of rank and of might;

insignia that had meant more to Bastien than what they represented had meant to his overlord—and he had nothing left. The Marquis lived and labored strenuously, craftily—for his King; Bastien fretted and pined for material symbols forever gone.

For example: On the old estate a gibbet had stood since time immemorial—convenient for the hanging of recalcitrant retainers. For the marquisate de Clamorgan carried with it the right so to deal with its serfs. No Marquis of them all had done so for centuries. None had wished to do so. But the sign of the right had been sacrosanct to them, and to Bastien had hallowed his service. And more than he resented his seigneur's inability to mark with a Calvary, or even a cross, the grave in which they had laid a dear dead nun, he resented that seigneur's refusal of the permission he begged, almost on his knees, to contrive and erect behind the oleander trees some manner of gibbet, as a sign and a token.

Every stone dove-cote in France had been destroyed in the Terror. For in 1787 only lords might keep pigeons; and so a dove-cote in your garden proved you noble. The de Clamorgans were noble, the good God knew, none in France nobler! The authentic nobility dated from the Crusades, but of it all, only three of its princes, seven ducs, eleven marquises, and twenty-five counts could prove their creations from before the seventeenth century. The marquisate de Clamorgan was as old as the French monarchy, which had lasted seven centuries in an

unbroken line of succession. And while the old estate had boasted but one gibbet, it had all but bristled with dove-cotes. And many a dove-cote Bastien had made his petite mademoiselle while she was still "tout-aufait bébé," cutting them out of cardboard toilsomely with his stiff, clumsy fingers. And when forbidden the gibbet, the lovingly mulish old fellow had actually built a dove-cote of sorts out of stones between the grave of Sœur Marie Xavier and the oleanders. And almost his master had let him keep it there too—so little it looked like the real thing—but an excess of caution had prevailed, and Bastien had been forced to demolish stone by stone his absurd little temple and assertion of loyalty to a *régime* that had passed.

And so nothing was left him, nothing of the state his serf-soul loved to keep, nothing but to squat, as now, by a stagnant mock-pool, and thrash into silence obstreperous frogs that had never been hatched.

It poisoned his old bones with cold and with cramp! But in mercy his seigneur let him keep it —his absurd crazy custom.

In all else he was sane and useful enough—obedient, devoted. And in a way his devotion was even finer than the devotion of the Marquis de Clamorgan. The Marquis had hope. Bastien had none. The Marquis dreamed of a day when the sacred chrism of Clovis should be broached once more, in the old Cathedral of Reims, broached for

another Louis's anointing. Bastien but dreamed of his dead.

They had little in common, these two old men and they had much: the sangbleu and his serf—the Marquis and his chattel.

The Marquis had been admirably trained by a reverend tutor of the Society of Jesus. Bastien had been trained by the centuries. De Clamorgan had earned the Pope's blessing and the Cross of St. Sylvester. He had performed the pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Louis, carrying in his own hand a lit taper that weighed seven pounds, marching and singing in a chanting procession. He belonged to the stately Order of the Holy Ghost. A Chevalier des Ordres du Roi, he belonged to les Ordres de St. Michael et de St. Louis, wearing still on his monarch's birthday the famous azure ribbon of the Holy Ghost and its cross of white enamel with its eight points and the golden dove, and the black ribbon and the collar of golden cockle-shells of St. Michael. Bastien had earned the trust of his seigneur, owned three coats (and the tattered but warm old shawl) and a silver ring that had been his mother's. He told his beads on a rosary a noble had kissed on the scaffold. And they had a toast in common, neither ever neglected to give—aloud if he dared, in his heart alone if he must, de Clamorgan rising gravely after his ragoût and his crême, his ice-punch and his coffee, Bastien crossing himself over his onion and bread, his soup and his melon:

"To the devil with the Republic! Long live the King!"

They worked side by side for a cause they both loved, one with hope, one without it, two devoted old men. And upon the peasant-tenacity of the loyalty of the Lucettes and the Bastiens among his adherents the hope of the Bourbon was as well-founded as it was upon the more brilliant endeavors of the sangbleus. And he was to owe it as much to just such dog-like, peasant devotion as to the devotion of his nobles that he did return to the throne that was his, to rule kindly and kingly, his memory smirched to-day only that he confirmed the regicide Fouché in the dukedom the Corsican gave.

The Marquis wrote late.

Laurette slept well. And she smiled in her dream.

And Bastien crouched on, and whipped at the water until his old flesh could do so no longer, and he too creaked off to rest.

CHAPTER XXXV

WHERE IS ARMAND?

LAURETTE sat at her harp, strumming it softly, singing to herself a happy little love-song.

The day had been bitter enough, she torn with anxiety, hungry for news, alone for the most part —her uncle closeted with Bastien, or rushing off

and then back, on errands of which he did not speak. No word of her father. No word of Armand! Well wrapped in a soft, fur-bordered pelisse, for it was growing colder and colder; arctic for May! —she had pottered about the villa grounds most of the day—this was the fourteenth—shifting a plant, feeding a pet, tending the disguised grave of the nun —restless, tormented, distrait. But with night peace like a balm had fallen on her breast, and her worry and care had slipped away with the sun. She had no guess why. But the oasis of peace had come, and something sang to her heart, as she sang to her harp, "All will be well, all will be well!" And alone in her bedroom she was taking her ease, a loose film of gauzy silk and lace thrown over her soft petticoats and her hand-painted gauze chemise, her naked white feet tucked into soft boudoir shoes, her soft veil of hair free on the white of her neck and the rose of her pretty peignoir.

French extravagance had nearly reached its apex that year, and in nothing was it more unbridled and lavish than in the furnishings of women's bedrooms. There were costlier bedrooms in Paris than this; hundreds—but none that was prettier, and few half so dainty.

A girl's room, French and exquisite, just the casket one would hope for the dainty intimate hours of lovely Laurette—it was all pearl and delicate green—walls, curtains, cushions, furniture, rugs; the green rather predominating and throwing up, as a calyx its flower, the loveliness of the girl in

the rose-colored gown, with the soft mist of black hair veiling her neck, her exquisite face like a cameo cut from the heart of a tea-rose, her eyes like matchless sapphires. Every toilet accessory of ivory, crystal and gold, every pillow of tussore and brocade, the Indian shawls of the couch, the silk shades on the scented candles, the costly rug on the floor, the beech logs flaming still on the hearth, spoke of wealth and of personal taste indulged and encouraged. The whole room breathed of Laurette—a very grande dame, if still very young, who sang to her harp in a négligée a siren must have coveted—a grande dame, and no shop-girl this!

If Fate had dealt harshly with Laurette, making her motherless, giving her loneliness, Nature had heaped her with beauty and grace. She had an adorable body. Her face was distractingly pretty—even a woman could but think so—and the voice that was singing was as sweet as the face, as sweet as the slim, gracious figure, and as bright and clear and true as the sparkling blue eyes. And loveliest of all were the arms lifted up to the strings of the harp. Nature owed Laurette de Chateaubriant nothing—not a sou!

French fashions just then left decency something to sigh for. Waists began high up under the arms and ended, but for a narrow shoulder-strap or two, very much where they began. Skimp skirts cut of gauze showed more than they hid. Sleeves were a puff and a fluff at the shoulder, bouffant and brief—but they were pretty, those fashions, ravishingly

so! No denying them that. And for a girl, alone in her room at the nearing of midnight, nothing could have been more charming than Laurette's clinging cashmere and muslin, nothing whatever except the girl that wore them.

"Si vous désire que je m'en——" The song ended abruptly. Some one was knocking below imperatively.

Laurette ran from her harp to the window, and peered out through the curtains. Yes—there was a cabriolet at the gate. Then de Clamorgan's voice came up the stairs—speaking to old Bastien. "Hasten," it said, "my bags! Just those that are already packed." Her uncle's steps came up the stairs. He knocked at her door. "Laurette! Laurette—are you up, my child?"

"Yes, my Uncle," she answered, pulling her door back. "How long you have been this last time! Since three!"

The Marquis came in quickly, hatless, of course, but wearing his cloak and his gloves.

"I have been delayed——" he told her hurriedly —"a communication at last—at the very last moment—from the Chevalier!"

"From Monsieur de Trevières?"

"No, no, child," he corrected, "from the *real* Chevalier. After waiting all these weeks! to send at the eleventh hour like this—upsetting all our plans! It is unreasonable! Imprudent!"

"Is he coming to rescue my father to-morrow, then, after all?" Laurette asked in an odd voice.

"So he says! And he keeps his word, as a rule."

Laurette went to the fireplace and rested her forehead against the mantel. So! She was to see Purple Mask at last! What would that not have meant to her once? Once! Yes—a week ago! And now—All the Saints! What was it she felt? Joy? Pain? Shame? It was all three! Where was her heart? Where was her pride?

"Bastien! Bastien!" de Clamorgan called from the door impatiently—"Make haste!" Then he told Laurette, striding about the room, more restless than she remembered ever to have seen him, "I must leave for Paris at once."

"To-night?" Laurette exclaimed, surprised.

"This instant!" Bastien stood at the door. "Tell the driver I shall be ready to leave again immediately. His horses must finish their feeding in five minutes. And he must drive me to Paris with all possible speed. And—Bastien," as the servant was going, "bring me the old coat and hat I used to use in Paris—and turn out my desk"—he threw the man his keys—"you know—the large one where everything of importance is kept—and bring all its contents here——"

"Very good, Monsieur le Marquis——"

"Hasten! hasten!" de Clamorgan urged testily. And Bastien as nearly fled as he could, his old legs pattering out in excited obedience. "Now listen, child!" Her uncle sat down on the couch, and she came and put herself beside him. "The Chevalier instructs us to meet him at the North Gate of Paris

to-morrow night, dressed as ordinary travelers. Your father will be brought into Paris by that gate. The Chevalier believes that the escort conducting him will arrive shortly before twelve o'clock. They will stop there for a brief rest. Exactly at midnight he proposes to rescue your father from the very Toll-house itself."

"From the middle of the escort!" Laurette exclaimed, incredulity fighting admiration.

"He gives no particulars," her uncle continued; "only that we are all to be fully armed, and prepared for a sharp encounter."

"And when shall I see you again, my Uncle?" the girl asked wistfully, her hands on his arm.

"That is the point. You are to come too."

"To Paris!"

"The Chevalier wishes it. Not knowing the details of his plan, I dare not risk disregarding any of his instructions. He expressly asks that you and Madame de Grisolles shall be there; and adds that you are to accompany your father to England."

"To-morrow!" she said musingly. So soon! And would Armand indeed be there? Of course he would—he had said so—but should they be able to speak to each other freely? When was Armand coming to England? They would meet there, of course. But when? And where was Armand now?

"It is too late for you to travel to-night," the Marquis was saying. "And there is no necessity. Bastien will bring you to Paris to-morrow morning

—to Madame de Breau's. We must all avoid the Rue de Richelieu—that goes without saying."

Bastien came in while his master was speaking, an odd collection—of what might have been the treasures of some traveling showman—in the faithful old arms. "Here is everything from the desk, Monsieur," he said.

"Good," said the Marquis. "That is positively everything in this house in which the police could possibly take any interest." He seated himself at the girl's toilet table, and began a deft process which Laurette had often watched—and never without anxiety—for it meant he was going to danger.

"The police, my Uncle! Do you fear a visit from the police?" she asked.

"No, no, child," he assured her as he slipped over his own hair one of the wigs Bastien had brought; and began touching his face skillfully with grease paint and crayon—just touching it—old Jean de Clamorgan was no bungler. He was an artist at disguise. "Merely a precaution. We shall not return here, and I do not intend to leave anything behind that can incriminate us." He put on a pair of glasses, changed his cravat for a stock, and rising, threw off his coat. Bastien stood ready with the other. The change was complete. Disguise was not difficult in that time and place: half the population wore wigs ordinarily, and the elaborate and varied costume in vogue was disguise in itself.

A bag Bastien had brought the Marquis emptied of papers, sorted them rapidly, but carefully,

pocketed some, handed the others to Bastien, saying, "Burn them! And, Laurette," pointing to the box from which he had selected his wig, "burn this box of disguises. They are of no further use. Thank Heaven, once safe in England we shall have no more need of them. So—burn them—and now, I am off! Adieu——" He took her in his arms, and laid on her brow a kiss that was also a blessing —his little Laurette! "Bastien! A rug and a scarf! Warm ones!" And the old faithful servant ambled off to get them.

"I am afraid," Laurette began.

"Chut!" he chided, "you are safe here with Bastien."

Laurette smiled—reproving him in her turn. "It is not of myself I am thinking," she said with a sigh—"it is of you, and—and—and of all the members of the band."

(Laurette! Oh, Laurette!)

"Our plans are well laid," the Marquis reassured her, "and now that we have heard from the Chevalier at last——"

"But Brisquet? He is at large again!"

De Clamorgan laughed grimly. "I think I have provided Monsieur Brisquet with sufficient occupation to keep him magnificently busy for a considerable period."

Laurette winced. "And"—she said gravely—"and—the Comte de Trevières?"

"Ciel!" was the only answer, his watch in his

hand. "A quarter to eleven! It is even later than I thought. I have not a moment to waste."

"Oh, my Uncle!" the girl said, the dew gathering on the gentian-blue eyes, "you are all doing something—all but just me—even Bastien fetches and carries for you. I wish it might be that I could do something to serve the Cause too—instead of staying idly here at home!"

The old Marquis regarded her curiously. "Ah," he said, with a slow, twisted smile, "perhaps you serve it unconsciously, my child!"—and he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE LOVE-TRAP

BASTIEN came back while Laurette stood at her window watching her uncle's voiture drive swiftly away.

She drove him to bed, and, assured of her comfort and content, he went almost willingly. For he had scarcely been in bed since two nights ago. And the frogs were quiet to-night. Already twice he'd been out and listened.

"What a lovely night!" she said to herself as she drew the curtains across the window. Where was Armand? she wondered.

She sat down on the stool, all cambric, ribbon and embroidery, in front of her toilet table, and began

giving her hair its good-night brush—humming again the lilting refrain of the old love-song. "Si vous désire que je m'en——" What was that? And again!

Gravel against her window's pane, thrown up by an accurate hand. Thrown gently. Scarcely abruptness enough to startle a bird in its nest. What could it be? A message for her uncle, perhaps? Or—could it be—was it possible? Pulling her négligée closer about her, she drew back the damask curtains, and leaned from her window, peering down into the garden.

"Who's there?" she asked quietly.

"It is I, Laurette—Armand!" came back the reply she had hoped and had feared.

"Armand!" she repeated.

"Are you alone?" he asked her.

"Oh, yes!"

"May I come up?" And taking her silence for consent he began pulling himself up hand over hand by the thick vines that half covered the villa.

"Oh, be careful," she cautioned. "If you should slip!"

But he was in at the window—dusty, laughing, a whip in his hand, wearing a long coat and stout riding-boots. The whip fell to the floor with his hat, and he held out his arms, very gently. For it was late, and they were alone.

"Armand! What has happened?" she whispered as she shyly yielded the pretty peignoir and all

that it held to those strong dusty arms. "My father—is anything wrong?"

"Wrong?" he laughed with his face on her hair. "No!"—with his lips on her eyes—"I promised you I would come, my beloved, and here I am! Where is the uncle, mignonne?"

"He has just started for Paris."

"For Paris?"

"To the rescue of my father—you have not forgotten? To-morrow is the fifteenth—the great day. You told me you would be there too."

"Most certainly I shall be there," de Trevières said, reading her face, as the blind read—with lingering fingers.

And for a little she let him read uninterrupted. She felt so safe leaning against that nice old coat, so at home in those funny great arms—more at home than she had ever felt in her life before—anywhere. But after a little she broke away shyly, and slipped back into a chair.

De Trevières followed her, and sat promptly down on its arm, circling her shoulders with an arm of his own.

She leaned her head back on that pillow, a little wearily, the man who was watching her narrowly thought. And presently she drew a sharp sigh—and looked at him with wide, troubled eyes.

"What is it, my little Laurette?"

"Something haunts me," she said.

"Something haunts you! What is it, petite?"

"Something—I'm ashamed of!"

"You! Nonsense——"

"And I'm afraid too," the girl said piteously.

"Afraid! Nothing shall harm you: I am here. What is it you fear, Laurette?"

"You!" the girl said sadly. "You—and what I must tell you. It's—it's—a confession."

The Comte de Trevières slipped from his perch on the arm of the chair, slipped down till he knelt in front of Laurette. He took her little hands in his own, and kissed the wee, soft, white things, first the one, then the other. Then he laid them down one on each of his shoulders. "So!" he told her, letting his hands just rest over hers; his left on her left, his arms crossed. "Now. Tell me, my own little Laurette."

Often kneeling at the confessional, this good little Catholic had been put to for some sin to confess, so sheltered from all worse than sorrow had her life been, and her nature so alien to wrong. But now, this confessor, secular and so dear, kneeling there at her knee, his eyes holding hers, his eyes adoring and trusting, her dilemma was not for a sin to confess, but for strength to confess it. Armand felt the little fingers under his flutter a breath, and he stiffened his face. Simply he must not laugh at this dear little penitent.

She trembled. But she came of brave stuff. And after one more sharp breath, her eyes fair on his —for the most—they faltered and dropped now and then—she made her confession.

"Oh! Monsieur," she began, "I have done a light

thing. I am weak. I—I—have loved—very dearly —before—before—you came——"

Fie! Monsieur le Comte de Trevières! Whose fingers are trembling now? Tell us that!

"Even now—I—I scarcely know—which—oh!" —she was sobbing—"which has my heart! If," she concluded passionately, "such a heart, inconstant, disloyal, is worth any man's having!"

Armand de Trevières had grown pale, and she might have felt him shudder a little, had she been less engrossed in her own misery.

"For two years—his name has been first in my prayers—his face most in my dreams—and now—in you sometimes I forget him—and, then, when you are gone—sometimes, in thinking of him, I forget you! Oh! Monsieur, tell me—what should a girl do? Such a girl!"

She pulled her hands from his holding, and he let them go. Laurette hid her face in her hands.

Armand de Trevières rose to his feet.

"Little Laurette," he said very gently, when he could speak. "We must find out—you and I—which—which it is. You must make no mistake. You shall not suffer. I think—I think—you have mistaken pity for love. They are kinsmen, you know." He tried to laugh—but he missed it—"I came into your life—at a discount—your uncle gave me a treatment you thought not quite fair—and so your generous heart turned to me, and you mistook —No!" he cried in sudden revulsion, and the girl dropped her hands and looked at him startled.

"No! My God! It was no mistake. It was love that came to us on the instant! It was love that claimed us, and linked us forever. That—that other—it was but a dream, a blunder. You will forget him! You have! You shall!"

"Monsieur, I shall never forget him," Laurette said sadly. "It was my first love!"

"And I am your last!" he cried violently.

"Oh," she sobbed—"I do not know—I do not know!"

"May I," he faltered, "will you—will you tell me—the name?"

She shook her head slowly.

"I beg you——"

"But I can't," Laurette said.

"Why?"

"Because"—she stammered—"you see, I do not know it myself——"

"What do you mean, child?" In his excitement de Trevières caught at her wrists. "You do not know his name! It is impossible. And you said that—in your prayers——"

"Ah! yes. We have a name for him. But it is not his name. That I *do* not know. We call him," she whispered, "we call him, Monsieur, 'Purple Mask'——"

As if a blow in the face, a blow stronger than he, had reached him, Armand de Trevières staggered a step back from Laurette.

A cry—it was a sob too—broke from him.

Did man ever faint—from relief? he wondered.

"Laurette——" he said, when he could command himself, speaking very reverently, all the mad man-passion rioting in his veins held in leash—for she was motherless, very young, it was night, this was her room—the room of her sleep. But his face was aflame, and there were tears in his eyes—oh! the big baby!—"I, too, have a confession to make."

He went to her—close. Bent his mouth to her ear—and whispered——

She pushed him away, and stood searching his face for a moment. And then she laughed—or was it a sob—"Oh! Ciel! Can it be?"

"On my soul!" de Trevières told her.

Then she held out her arms, and when he came (it was not long) she hid her face on his breast.

Neither spoke. Neither moved—for some time.

But at last, drawing back from the shelter she loved, laughter sparkling through tears in her blue eyes, Laurette said curiously, "What brought you here to-night?"

"Why, your letter," he told her, laughing tenderly at the foolishness of her question.

"My letter," Laurette exclaimed incredulously, drawing from him in surprise.

"Yes—of course. The letter you sent this morning, telling me to come here to you to-night—and the hour. Did you doubt I'd obey?"

"Armand!" the girl sobbed. "I have sent you no letter!"

Armand de Trevières gave a long, silent whistle. "So!" he said. "So! That was their move!"

"Move? What do you mean, Armand?"

"Your uncle, and Brisquet. Your uncle dared not put Fouché's police on the track of my lodging in the Rue de Grâce, because in finding me they might have found too much else—and it is only my one life that le Marquis our uncle wishes to risk. So, I received this letter this morning."

He held out a sheet to Laurette—when he had pulled it away from just over his heart.

Laurette read it silently with a darkening face. It ran: "I implore you to come to me to-night at St. Cloud. I shall be alone at eleven o'clock. If you do not come we may never meet again. Your —Laurette."

"It is a perfect imitation of my handwriting," she said sadly, handing it back—with a shrug of despair.

"Does not that convince you," de Trevières said, as he bent at the fireplace and burned it, "who wrote it?"

"My uncle!" the girl sighed. "But why?"

"He has used our love to draw me into this trap," Armand said bitterly.

"A trap?" Laurette echoed miserably.

"Yes, doubtless the indefatigable Brisquet is hard on my track at this moment with his squadrons of gendarmes and hussars."

"Oh—Armand!" Laurette exclaimed in dismay. "Go! Go! There may yet be time to escape them——"

"There may be"—he said, thinking rapidly—

"but I doubt it. They would realize that we might discover the forgery at once."

And as he spoke a louder noise came—the trampling of horses, the clanking of sabers—confused at first—in the distress—coming nearer and nearer, clearer and clearer—the Corsican's sleuth-hounds baying hot on the trail of Armand de Trevières, a servant of his King.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IS LOVE LICENSED TO LIE?

LAURETTE darted towards the window.

"Don't look out!" de Trevières said quickly. "They'll see the light!"

"Where shall I hide you?" Laurette whispered.

"Here they are!" was Armand's answer, as a loud knocking began on the front door downstairs. "So, now for Monsieur Brisquet!" and he moved to the door.

But Laurette de Chateaubriant reached it first, and put her back against it. "Where are you going?" she said.

"Quick, dear, let me pass," de Trevières whispered, "I must not be found here—in your room—at this hour."

For reply she turned the key quickly, and thrust it into her bosom—and smiled love and scorn in his face. "You shall *not* go!" she told him quietly.

"What are you doing, Laurette?" The knocking grew louder and louder. "Think—of your situation, my little girl, if I am found here—and by those canaille."

"No matter!" Laurette said scornfully. "But you will not be found here. Quick. Get behind the curtains of the bed. There is quite enough room between the bed and the wall though there looks to be none. Quick. Go! I will go to bed, and put out the lights. Leave all the rest to me."

"You splendid girl!" de Trevières cried, moved to his soul by her courage and devotion. A French girl's generosity could not go further.

A moment he tarried—to kiss her, with love, with reverence.

Then—to the sound of a furious hubbub of knocks on the door below, he slipped between her elaborately curtained bed and the wall.

Quicker than telling, Laurette de Chateaubriant dashed to the candles and blew them out—two on the mantel, two on the dressing-table, all—seized a nightgown from its case—the prettiest nightdress under the moon—slipped into it from the pink négligée—one stubborn tape she broke in her haste, —unlocked the door noiselessly and slipped into bed, letting the little pink shoes fall as she pulled up the coverlet.

The knocking grew louder still—and then ceased. Men's voices, the clank of their arms, the thump of their boots took its place—inside the door this time.

"They have entered the house," she said in a whisper. "They're searching downstairs." The voices drew nearer—and the clank and the boots. "Here they come!"

And Armand de Trevières whispered her an answer, "Au revoir, my little Laurette."

The voices grew nearer, and with them the clatter of sabers came up the stairs; one rough knock on the door—a door of Laurette's had never been so knocked on before—and it was flung open, sans cérémonie.

Lavernais entered, two brigadiers at his heels. Not the insouciant Lavernais who had bought gold braid galore for the sake of a dimple, not the dapper young officer who walked on the boulevards with his left shoulder just a thought raised to show the hang of his gold-frogged, astrakhan-like bordered coat jauntily slung cape fashion—one arm not in its sleeve, but a stern-lipped, determined soldier taut on the miscreant track of his prey.

"Bring a light!" he commanded.

One brigadier seized, from a comrade in the hall, a lantern, brought it, flashed it about the room, saw the curtains screening the alcove and flung them back wide.

With a startled cry Laurette sat up in bed, blinking at the light as if just half awake—a charming picture amongst the laces and pillows. It was beautifully done.

"Don't be frightened, my dear," Lavernais told her. "No one is going to hurt you" . . . taking

a step towards the bed he recognized the prettiness nestled there. His stupefaction was complete. "Mademoiselle Laurette!" he stammered.

Laurette was delighted. This should make her part easier.

"Captain Lavernais!" she cried, startled—oh, yes, enormously startled—but not altogether displeased, *reassured,* on the whole, by the sight of one she greatly trusted, and decidedly liked, and in a tone that went straight to Eugène Lavernais's heart, which was just where it was intended to go. "Oh!" and with the prettiest girlish gesture in the world, half instinct, half very high art, she drew the bedclothes around her until only her chin, nothing beneath it, peeped out, like a frightened flower, from the silk and fripperies of her elaborate bedding.

"Well!" Lavernais panted, falling back a few steps, "this—this *is* a surprise."

"A surprise!" the girl echoed—"it certainly is. Pray," she added, more amazed than enangered, "what are you doing here?"

Lavernais tossed that question back to her: "What are you doing here, Mademoiselle?"

"Why, I live here!" she answered frankly.

"Here! But I thought—your shop in——" Lavernais stammered.

"The little shop pays, Monsieur. My uncle has saved. This is our other home, where we rest when we can. But what on earth brings you here, Monsieur?"

"We are looking for the notorious Chevalier of the Purple Mask," he told her.

The soldiers were moving about the room, staring at everything as if their eyes would riddle it, and lighting all the candles. The new flood of light made little Mademoiselle de Chateaubriant blink and wink sleepily. Lavernais had known that her lashes were lovely, but he had not known half how lovely till now.

"Oh!" the artist in the bed shuddered, "how dreadful! Oh, if my uncle were here—or even the Abbé!" One little white hand reached out from the coverlet, helpless, appealing—and then crept quickly back, appalled at its own unmaidenly boldness. "I am all alone here," she sobbed, "but for old Bastien, half-daft. Oh, Monsieur le Capitaine, you will protect me!" There were tears in her eyes —wide awake now!—and the catch in the girlish voice was as seductive as ever her dimple had been.

The Captain Lavernais was undone. Shorn of his self-sovereignty as if the hussar wig with its down-handing white plaits had been the locks of Samson.

"You will take care of me, Captain Lavernais?"

"With my life," he told her. He went nearer the bed—but not very near—"with my honor," he added through lips that were pale, half from a girl's loveliness—a girl on her pillows—and half with foreboding, for Eugène Lavernais half suspected this girl. Love is not blind. Love's sight is sharp and clear. Ah! well, he loved her, this girl,

with the love of his life—not his first—perhaps not his last—but his deepest. He loved her, and he would pay love's price—be what it might!

"We have information that he is here, to-night—the Purple Mask," he continued.

"Here! Oh, you must be joking!" but she looked about the room with eyes that were distracted with terror. Not an actress at the Ambigu, the Opéra Comique or the Théâtre de Troubadours could have done it better. And at the Théâtre Français itself there were not three actresses that could have done it so well.

"No," he told her, "it is no joke, I assure you. And," he added regretfully, "I have strict orders to surround and search this particular house—thoroughly."

"Oh, very well, Capitaine," Mademoiselle de Chateaubriant said, disgusted, indignant, but resigned, "carry out your orders! Ransack the house! Open the wardrobe! Be as rough as you like with my poor tissues and nets. Rip open the furniture! My mother embroidered the tapestry of that couch—slash it to shreds. It would scarcely hide a five-year-old child, but slash it open, I beg. Be thorough, I insist"—she was getting a trifle hysterical—and it was no wonder—under the horrid strain, poor child. "Go on! Begin!" and the soldiers did, at her word, waiting no longer for their Captain's order—taking it for granted—"only pray, Monsieur," she faltered, maidenly shame overcoming her vixenish anger, "consider the—the

—the delicacy of my position—I—I—shall die of shame." That last extreme proof of modesty she might or might not give. Armand de Trevières, shaking perilously with laughter behind the tent of the bed, thought she would not, but she was sobbing from it, or from some other poignant emotion.

Lavernais almost could have wept too—with sympathy and dilemma. "Mademoiselle!" he pleaded, "I am overwhelmed with regret. It is intolerable that I should distress you so. Is there *no* woman in the house?—a housekeeper—a maid?"

"No—no—I tell you," she sobbed desolately, "only the one old man! I—I—am quite alone—at the mercy of your brutal soldiers." She sobbed softly, like a frightened child, but peeped up through her tears to add a little less miserably, "and at yours."

One of the soldiers, searching the room, approached the great bed, and touched the curtains of its awning. Laurette promptly shrank back on her pillows and pealed forth a piercing shriek. Oh! she missed no cues, nor took them up tardily, this blue-eyed amateur comedienne!

"Mademoiselle!" Lavernais besought, deprecating, soothing.

"Don't let him touch me!" the girl wailed. "Oh, the brute! Take him away!" And with an exquisite volley of sobs and cries she caught up one of her pillows, zephyr-soft, down and muslin, and hurled it, in distraught defiance, straight at the big brigadier. And she aimed rather well—for a girl. It

went almost as near him as it did to the fireplace.

"Brigadier!" his Captain commanded, "come away at once!"

"I didn't touch the lady," the soldier said stoutly, half angry, wholly amused, "I was going to look behind the bed."

The lady burst into a perfect fusillade of sobbing. "Oh, I am dying of shame! Go away! Go away!"

(Armand de Trevières was terribly afraid of laughing aloud. And oh! How he wanted to hug her! And how he would too!—when he could.)

"Mademoiselle," almost Lavernais wailed it, "I implore you—no one will harm you—oh, I beseech, I entreat you—do, do not cry! I—I cannot endure that you weep!"

"I—I'm not crying! I'm laughing!" she sobbed. "Go on!" she ordered the soldiers. "Go on! Search! Search, I tell you. Break open everything!"

"It is not necessary, Mademoiselle!" Captain Lavernais said earnestly. "You have only to give me your word——"

"Of what use is my word?" Laurette demanded hotly. "How do I know the dreadful man may not be hiding in the house now?" It was a master stroke! The best she had done yet! Armand de Trevières swayed on his feet with joy and clapped his hands in noiseless applause. He had to!

It was magnificent acting. Lavernais was convinced. He sighed with relief. His duty was easier now.

"True," he said. "So, then, as a form, just—if you will—give me your word that the Chevalier of the Purple Mask is not in this room and has not been here to-night."

Laurette de Chateaubriant sat up on her pillows, her ravishing face *riant* with smiles, even she let the coverlet slip—not far—but it escaped her white throat and the soft swell of her gown. "Oh!" she said with an adorable shrug—"if that is all! Why didn't you say so before, Monsieur le Capitaine Lavernais? Monsieur!"—she stretched out her arm, as if in an oath, and the pink sleeve of her cambric fell away from its snow—"Monsieur! I give you my word of honor"—Armand de Trevières held his breath—"that since I came from Paris yesterday, no man, masked or unmasked, or of any color or shade whatsoever, except only my uncle, and old Bastien our servant, has passed through that door—except you yourself—and these——" She broke off with an eloquent gesture—pointing to the two brigadiers—pointing because she had no word to describe them.

Was it well done or ill?

We all know that the lie that's half a truth is the blackest of lies.

And Lavernais trusted her.

True! But she was screening her lover.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

DEMOCRACY IN THE ASCENDANT

"THAT is sufficient, Mademoiselle," Eugène Lavernais said gravely. He turned to his hussars—his eye just glimpsing the window at the turn of his head. Had he a thought of what might have been its office? On his soul he could never answer that question in the after years when he searched his own soul. And, if he could not, how should we? He turned to his soldiers. "He is not here. Search the other rooms," he said tersely.

The hussars went from the room—and to this day Eugène Lavernais sometimes wonders what they thought.

Behind the bed Armand de Trevières was dancing! Yes—he was, the mad dare-devil—just a step or two, flattened well against the wall—the alcove was deep—dancing a few steps light as a shadow and as soundless.

Lavernais lingered but a moment to apologize for the intrusion to which his duty had forced him.

"I bear you no grudge, Capitaine," Laurette assured him, and so did her dimples.

He turned to go, saying, "I will leave a guard at your gate. You shall not be subjected to another intrusion," when an angry voice cried outside the door, "What? Impossible! I tell you we have certain information! Stand aside!"

"The devil," Lavernais said.

"Oh! no, it's that terrible Brisquet," Laurette said, sitting bold upright—alarmed in rude earnest this time—no need to sham it—and the dimples were cowards: they had fled. "I know his voice. Brisquet!"

"That's what I mean," the Captain said glumly.

And Brisquet it was—on the alert—dressed in his own clothes. He came in without knocking and accosted Lavernais eagerly. "Well, Captain, have you got him?"

"He is not here," Lavernais said shortly.

"Are you absolutely certain?" Brisquet was staggered.

"Absolutely."

Brisquet was a poor soldier. He had proved it when masking as Orsanelli at Evreux. But he was a good detective. He threw his detective eye around the room, here, there, everywhere. He went to the window. He inspected the dressing-table. He gave the girl and her bed a long look, unblunted by sympathy. "The Chevalier is concealed somewhere in this room," he insisted.

"We have looked everywhere," Lavernais returned a little contemptuously.

"Except where you should have looked first," the policeman retorted with a sneer. "Citizeness!" he said sharply, going up to Laurette, "we know that the Chevalier of the Mask is here. If you shelter a man whose life is forfeited, you yourself run the risk of the guillotine."

Laurette de Chateaubriant stiffened proudly on her pillows, put her hands to her throat with an indescribable gesture of pride and defiance, and looked full into the face of Brisquet, her own face radiant with patrician contempt and dislike. For herself she had no fear of Brisquet, and would have had none of Napoleon. For herself he did not exist —neither the hired man nor the upstart usurper, his master.

But if she did not flinch, neither did mein herr Brisquet. The scorn of a girl, and a lady at that, had no weight with Brisquet.

"Kindly dress yourself," he said curtly.

"Why?" Laurette demanded as crisply. "What do you want me to do?"

"You will know directly," the man said rudely. "I am going to draw these curtains. We will wait here till you're dressed."

"But this is abominable!" Mademoiselle de Chateaubriant exclaimed haughtily. "Captain!" she appealed.

And Lavernais, as indignant and sincerely as she pretended to be (for she was too anxious for Armand to feel even resentment for herself), came towards her instantly.

But Brisquet stayed him, and stood truculently between them. "The Captain Lavernais," he said spitefully, "can do nothing for you. I command here. Will you obey me—or shall I have to force you?"

Lavernais bit his lip till the blood came. And

Armand de Trevières had a hand on a trigger. A moment more and he would have saved all further searching. Perhaps Laurette divined and feared this. For she said scornfully, "Very well! I will get up."

"Ah, now we are getting more reasonable," Brisquet said offensively, as he drew the curtains. But after all it was not the poor creature's fault that he'd been sent into life cheaply made of coarse fabric.

"Did you look behind the bed?" he demanded, going to Lavernais.

"No," the hussar said shortly.

"Mon cher Capitaine"—Lavernais ached to throttle the presuming, patronizing rat. But what will you! Democracy entails the acceptance of queerer bedfellows than ever honest, much-maligned poverty does. "My dear Captain," the insolent drawled, "you would never make a good detective."

"I should hope not," Eugène Lavernais said as fervently as coldly.

"You have not the observing eye," Brisquet continued his taunting patronage. "Look at these!" He picked up a wig from the dressing-table. (Oh! Laurette, you were charged to burn them! And you Monsier de Clamorgan, you should have done it yourself. Fie on so old a conspirator to have left a precaution so important to a slip of a girl, and a girl in love at that!) "And at this!" Brisquet offered the indignant officer a fine set of whiskers. "Disguises! Just what you would expect to find

in a young girl's bedroom, are they not?" He picked up the bit of tape from the floor. He had seen it the moment he entered the room. "Do you see this tape? Does it tell you nothing?"

"What the devil should it tell me?"

"A plain story. The young lady did not undress before her mirror, but here, close to the door, where she was listening, doubtless to your arrival downstairs. She was so agitated that she tore the tapes from her gown instead of untying them."

"And what does that prove?" Lavernais thought that it was his turn to sneer; and he embraced it.

"That she hurried into bed when she heard you enter the house. She could not have been in a very deep sleep when you came in."

"I know nothing about that," Lavernais said crossly.

"But I do," Brisquet retorted. "She allowed you to search this room; she probably wanted you to do so. Am I right?" Lavernais bit his lip again. "She was persuaded that the tact and courtesy of so gallant a soldier would prevent you from searching the alcove." His sneering tone changed to one more direct; business-like, to the immediate point. "It is a certainty," he concluded with conviction, "that the man we are looking for is behind that bed."

"I am ready," Mademoiselle de Chateaubriant said wearily—but it served to interrupt Brisquet. "Where do you wish me to go?" she added indifferently, as she came through the curtains.

Brisquet paid her not even the civility of a glance. But he spoke to Lavernais: "Captain, be good enough to search behind that bed." And as he spoke he suddenly turned his ferret eyes on Laurette, watching her narrowly.

"Certainly," Lavernais agreed nonchalantly—more nonchalantly perhaps than he felt. The tape argument he thought far-fetched. But the wigs and the beards, goggles and huge cravats—they had perturbed him somewhat.

He threw Laurette a glance—almost she read in it a promise—and passed through the curtains into the alcove, his hand on his sword.

CHAPTER XXXIX

BEHIND THE BED

THERE are rare souls that so love adventure that they love it most when it's highly spiced with danger. Armand de Trevières was one of these odd, dashing creatures. And he was having a thorough good time behind the bed!

His eyes were dancing when Lavernais confronted him—or rather when he confronted Lavernais. The hussar was distressed—palpably. The vagrant was not. Whether eels like tight places or not, goodness only knows. But this agile hero did!

Neither spoke.

They stood facing each other—tensely.

Outside, in the room, Laurette and Brisquet were eyeing each other wickedly. The girl's heart was bursting, but it was not her rôle to let Brisquet see it—and she did not. She was a finished picture of superior indifference—a little smiling—superciliously, coldly—and very much bored.

Brisquet was baffled. But then, he reflected, you never could tell—about women.

Laurette sat on the couch swinging one dainty foot, straightening a ruffle. Oh, dear St. Geneviève, what would she not give to know what was going on behind the bed!

Well, an extraordinary something was going on behind the bed—at that moment!

Eugène Lavernais, with one hand on the hilt of his sword, lifted his other hand and laid across his own lips a significant finger.

He was sacrificing his own honor—his soldier's loyalty—to the honor of a girl who had sold out him and his love for the man standing there. And each of the two men knew it. They measured each other curiously—the lover accepted and the lover rejected. The spruce officer of Napoleon's crack regiment, rich, good-looking, marked for advancement; the outlaw, a soldier of fortune, frayed, dusty, discounted, poverty-poor, homeless, good-looking too (there was parity there and there only), marked for the scaffold.

Lavernais smiled singularly, and with a sigh turned on his heel.

A great wave of pity swept over the face of the émigré—not relief for his own respite, but sympathy for the man who had missed the incomparable all that he, Armand, himself had gained—the love of Laurette. For he understood perfectly. He had caught the tones of Lavernais's voice when the hussar had discovered whose bedroom they had invaded, and the tone in which Lavernais had spoken to Laurette through all the little comedy which de Trevières, for all the blindfold of his position behind the bed, had followed and comprehended as accurately as Laurette herself, and many times more than Monsieur le Capitaine Eugène Lavernais. He was moved for his rival—profoundly sorry for the man who had lost Laurette, and not less sorry for the soldier who had felt—in love—bound to betray his soldier fealty. Too, he had liked the fellow, at Evreux—as the other had liked him; each the victim of an unavoidable mutual attraction—the warm drawing of worth to worth.

Lavernais was going, but Armand de Trevières laid a hand on the Captain's shoulder.

Lavernais turned. Armand de Trevières held out his hand, in comradeship—a man to a man, lover to lover. Eugène Lavernais hesitated—the half of a breath—shook his handsome head with a queer, rueful smile, grasped the hand of the Royalist, who clasped in return warmly, pointed to some-

thing with his toe, whispered three words, and was gone.

He had no ill thought of Laurette, this true Gentleman of the Republic. He had no doubt of the reverence of this luckiest stranger's love for the girl of his own ardent longing. But he had cut the throat of his own white honor, rather than that her name should be smirched by one word or one look from the roughness of Brisquet, or of his own soldiers.

Was he right? Was he wrong? Who shall dare say? But fie, oh, fie! on the blue eyes of Laurette de Chateaubriant! A black-haired French girl has no right with gentian-blue eyes. It was not fair on the men of her warm-hearted race.

"Well?" Brisquet gutturaled, as Eugène came back from the alcove, back through the curtains; and Laurette's long lashes just curled the same question.

"There is no one there," the Captain replied.

"What?" Brisquet bellowed—stupefied and enraged. And Laurette let a long breath.

"Absolutely no one," Lavernais said with a shrug. He went back to the bed and wrenched the back curtains apart with a magnificent, disdainful gesture —a gesture that said plainly that perhaps in the near future the Citizen Brisquet would not question the assertion or so override the judgment of Eugène Lavernais.

Lavernais flung wide the curtains. "Absolutely no one," he said again, almost he taunted it.

Brisquet flung high his hands. "Is the man a wizard?" he snorted.

Laurette did not even trouble to look. Quick-witted as she was, she could not imagine to where Armand had escaped. But that he had escaped she was sure. Lavernais's eyes had signaled to her that it was so. And she knew she could take his word, whether Brisquet could or could not.

"Is he a wizard?" Brisquet repeated disgustedly. "Was the front door locked when you arrived?"

"No," Lavernais told him.

"Then he must have slipped out before we came. Sacré dieu! Where are the guards? You keep your eye on the girl." And he rushed out excitedly, calling vociferously, "Lieutenant Roche! Lieutenant Roche!"

Then Laurette turned to Lavernais with gratitude and question in her face.

"Where in the world was Armand?" she wondered. The curtains were still drawn apart. She knew—or she thought that she knew—every inch of the house. There were no trapdoors here, either in floor or in ceiling, no sliding panels. Where could he be?

A low laugh, almost at her feet, answered her. Armand's face broad with mirth looked up at her saucily from under the valance. The Comte de Trevières was *under* the bed!

CHAPTER XL

LAVERNAIS'S GUERDON

WITH a gay wink at Eugène, and a mock gesture of deep respect to the door through which Brisquet had gone, the rogue wriggled out, and sprang up.

"Ugh! Name of the devil! but 'twas a tight fit. And," he said to Laurette, "I should never have thought of it, dolt that I am, but for Monsieur here."

Laurette ran to Lavernais and held out her hand timidly. "Monsieur!" she said quickly, "oh! believe me, he did not come by the door," and she pointed to the window.

Eugéne Lavernais smiled in her eyes, and bending down to the hand she had offered, he kissed it gravely and slowly. He did it as taking a guerdon —a soldier who had given his honor—he did it in renunciation and, too, in farewell. Then he turned to Armand.

"Monsieur," he urged, "if you are quick, you may just have time to get away!"

But Armand de Trevières lingered—not for blue-eyed Laurette, but to say to Lavernais, "Monsieur, with all my heart I thank you."

"You owe it to Mademoiselle, believe me," the soldier said with an odd, twisted smile. "Oh! now, be off! There's a good fellow!"

And Laurette added her voice. "Go, Armand!" she pleaded.

But it was too late!

At a grunt—like a camel's—they looked towards the door.

And the camel-like Brisquet stood there, ungainly legs wide apart, long neck angrily out, spite and rage on his protuberant face.

"So!" he grunted again, "he was here! I thought as much!"

Armand swept him a profound obeisance. Lavernais folded his arms and waited. Laurette rose to her feet, and stood close by her lover.

"How remarkably clever of you, Monsieur Brisquet," de Trevières lisped admiringly. "You are really a very fine detective."

"You flatter me, Monsieur le Chevalier," Brisquet retorted sarcastically. "You trapped me at Evreux, but I fancy that I take this trick."

Armand bowed again with his hand on his heart, and a grin on his face.

"As for you, Captain," Brisquet sneered at Lavernais, "you must be tired—extremely tired; so I dare not entrust the prisoner to you. Your lieutenant will take your place." And from the door he shouted for Roche. "You can return to Paris tomorrow morning," he continued to Lavernais significantly.

Lavernais shrugged indifferently. "As you please, Citizen Brisquet," he said stiffly.

"In that case, Captain," Armand said, turning to

Eugène, "may I confide Mademoiselle Laurette to your escort and care? She also leaves for Paris early to-morrow morning. It will ease my mind if I can know that she has so bravé and so generous an escort."

"You confer on me, Monsieur," Lavernais answered, "a great honor and pleasure."

For a moment Jacques Brisquet thought of forbidding Laurette the journey. But he thought better of it. For one thing he was almost afraid to attempt to enforce the forbidding. Only Heaven knew what the infatuated hussar might not encompass on her behalf—the hussy *was* pretty—oh, well, let the little baggage go—she was dangerous goods —better away; and in part his tough heart failed him—it had a soft spot! So——

"Then, Mademoiselle," he said not so very uncivilly, "if you have to be up so early, you had better snatch some *more* sleep at once—in another room. The prisoner stays here."

"Armand! Must I go?"

De Trevières put his arms about her.

"One moment, Citizen Brisquet," he said, and with a grunt and a very queer look, Brisquet turned away and pretended to peer out at the garden. And Lavernais went with him.

With his arms still about her, de Trevières sat down on the couch. "There, there, little one," he said, with his cheek on her hair, "don't cry. Everything will come all right you will see." Then, kissing her face, between the kisses he slipped in the

words of a quick whisper. "To-morrow morning . . . look in the mattress . . . of your bed . . . this one . . . I will leave a message . . . for you there . . . Go as far from this room as you can . . . another part of the house . . . keep Lavernais with you . . . if you can . . . where he can't . . . hear what goes on here." Then again aloud, "Come, come. No more tears. Be brave, little one, we shall meet again soon."

Brisquet smiled sardonically.

"Now," Armand said, "good night, my Laurette!" He beckoned to Eugène Lavernais, kissed her once more, and stood smiling at her sunnily as Lavernais led her away.

"Good-by, Armand," she said from the door.

"Au revoir, Laurette!" he replied and corrected.

Lavernais opened the door. Roche and two brigadiers were standing there, on guard. He returned their salute and led Laurette along the corridor. "To which room shall I take you, Mademoiselle?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't care," was the somewhat ungrateful answer. But Laurette was terribly tired; and she realized it, now that she could neither touch, hear, nor see Armand. And she was horribly afraid that she was going to cry. But for all that she led the way—to the furthest room in the villa.

As they passed out of sight, Brisquet called Roche into the room. "Lieutenant," he said, "you will take command here. I know you will stand no

nonsense. I entrust to you the care of the Chevalier. See, we have him at last!"

"I am delighted," Roche said. And he was.

"He will pass the night here—and at daybreak be transferred to Paris. You will take every precaution to guard against his escape."

"He will not escape me," Roche said grimly. "I give you my oath on that!"

"Oh, it's you, is it?" de Trevières said, butting in gayly. "We met at Evreux."

"Thunder and blazes!" the red one exclaimed, looking at his new charge for the first time. "I should say we did meet at Evreux. Name of the devil! You tricked my Captain Lavernais with your sham gendarmes at Evreux; but you'll find me a tough nut to crack!"

"We'll take no risks this time," Brisquet commanded.

"I will stay with him myself, Citizen," Roche said determinedly.

Brisquet nodded approval of that.

"Oh, name of the devil!" de Trevières yawned, sleepy rather than ill-humored. "What a fuss you make! If you're going to talk all night, I'm going to make myself comfortable. I'm sleepy." And he rolled himself up in his cloak, and threw himself on the sofa.

"Let him sleep," Brisquet said—too pleased at the turn events had taken to grudge even Purple Mask so much. "You will remain in this room with your prisoner." Roche nodded. "You will be shut

in together—and the door locked from the outside. I will set a strong guard in the passage outside. And hussars will be posted under the windows and everywhere round the house."

"Just like you did at Evreux," came a sleepy voice from the sofa.

Brisquet nearly exploded—speechless with rage.

"Silence, prisoner!" Roche growled fiercely.

Armand de Trevières snored in reply.

"I leave you in charge here," Brisquet said once more, "and shall inform Fouché that the prisoner is in your hands."

Two soldiers came in with fresh candles and beech logs. Brisquet stood watching them moodily. Almost he suspected every one now. A night at Evreux had done that to him! When they had gone he went to the couch, and studied the Mask. Yes, undoubtedly the fellow slept. It was part of a detective's duty to know sham sleep from real. No one could deceive Brisquet on that point. He turned and went to the door.

"Good night, then," he said condescendingly, almost amiably, to Roche. "Good night, Monsieur the Chevalier of the Mask. You can sleep sound in the consciousness that it is impossible for you now to carry out the rescue of the Duc de Chateaubriant. To-morrow all Paris will ring with the news that Brisquet has triumphed, and that the notorious Chevalier of the Purple Mask has failed to carry out his greatest boast!"

De Trevières snored in reply.

CHAPTER XLI

BLUFFED TO A TURN

BUT Brisquet stalked out with pomposity unabated, as awkward and as important as the camel he so much resembled.

The key turned in the lock.

Jailer and jailed they were locked in together. No exit for either unless up the chimney, or down —as Armand had come—by the vine at the window.

Armand slept on—like a baby.

Towards morning Roche felt strangely sleepy. De Trevières had stirred only once, to turn over, complain of the cold, and beg that the window might be closed more securely. And nothing loath Roche fastened and locked it. He felt a thought chilly himself, and, too, he was not without some rough feeling of good-nature towards a fellow-creature so soon and so surely to die on the scaffold. The prisoner was duly grateful. He said so—and added that he was famished. Roche admitted feeling a little hungry himself. The Mask suddenly remembered that he had a few chestnuts somewhere, if only he could remember where. And presently he did remember where, and produced them from one of several capacious pockets. He not only insisted upon Roche having fully half of them, but he insisted upon his having all the biggest and best ones. The Chevalier even selected them himself for his

keeper. And Roche good-naturedly accepted and partook.

Presently he yawned once or twice, and stretched happily.

The prisoner threw the shells of his own and of Roche's chestnuts into the fire. By accident the handkerchief in which they had been knotted slipped in with them, and a twist of paper that seemed to have had a white powder in it. But De Trevières did not seem to care greatly. And soon tiny puffs of green smoke, almost impalpable, slipped from the fire into the room.

Alas for the prestige of the regiment of Captain Lavernais! Roche fell asleep—asleep at the post of duty!

And lest he should be discovered and aroused untimely, de Trevières mercifully undressed him—it *was* heavy work, but he did it at last!—tugged him on to the couch, covered him up in his own purple cloak—covered him very completely indeed—laughing softly while he did it—enjoying himself vastly.

Just to see how he'd look, the big tomboy of a Chevalier tried on the lieutenant's trousers and even his boots.

Just to see how he'd look—and how well he could do it—he sat down before Laurette's dainty mirror, and darkened his face à la Roche—using the cosmetics Laurette had neglected to burn.

A cock crew.

De Trevières whistled silently. "Daybreak! I

must be quicker." He slipped into Roche's coat, stuck on a fierce moustache—Majolin had been well provided for just such occasions—and this was no novice hand that was transforming, quicker than it can be told, Armand Comte de Trevières, substitute Purple Mask, into Lieutenant Roche of the New Republic's Hussars. This Royalist dare-all had been up to just such mountebank tricks before, you're safe to wager a guinea to a gooseberry on that.

Roche's white uniform wig was a mighty tight fit, for that warrior's vastness favored abdomen rather than forehead—but de Trevières managed. And when it was on and the white plaits hanging down on either side of a very red face, Armand was so hugely pleased with his appearance, Roche-like and fierce, that he blew himself a very big kiss in the glass. His hands! His hands never would do! Never mind! He'd no time to make himself new hands. He must hide them, that was all—hide them *and* remember to keep them well hidden. And the coat was miles too big—and the top of the trousers. "Let me see!" He stuffed them—a pillow or two, and a couple of scarves. Then he tied on the abhorred tricolor sash. Ah! his Royalist gorge rose at that—but, needs must!

"Not so bad," he said as he finished. "But oh, my friend," ramming into something better shape the cushion he was wearing for stomach, "you must have consumed a terrible lot of food—and drink—in your time! He's very quiet. I hope I haven't

finished him!" He went to the sofa, and turned down his own purple cloak from the face of the drugged sleeper. "He's breathing all right. I daresay he'll come round presently. My friend, I thought you'd never begin to get sleepy. Lucette must put the stuff in the chestnuts stronger next time. You have made me perilously late. However —now for her message." He wrote a few words on a sheet from the writing-table—kissed it!—caught up a pair of embroidery scissors—made a slit in the mattress, and after one more kiss—or perhaps it was two—shoved the little billet into the slit, and covered the bed again much as it had been left. Now he must leave the Purple Mask's finger-prints —to prove he'd been there. Ah, that fire-screen would do. Where was his purple crayon? In his own coat, of course. Dunderhead! His coat was out of sight under the sofa where he had stuffed it. That took but a trice. "I Take What I Will," it was written! The screen conspicuously placed, but the message to be discovered, not to be seen by any one at the door. Its discovery was not to be yet. To buckle on the hussar's big saber took no time at all. A few touches to the room, and after a quick look round he was ready for the last stroke of his coup. He looked at the harp—no—he couldn't hurt it—she had been playing on it as he came up the lane. The spinet? Yes, the spinet would do. And do the poor spinet did. It did to the floor with a thud and a crash, deliberately hurled over by Armand the masquerader. But he picked it up

quickly, put it as it had stood, gave a high falsetto scream, and sat quietly down on the chair facing the sofa, watching and guarding the purple-shrouded figure; he, a splendid sturdy example of vigilance, upright and faithful.

Before long—just as he was getting impatient—a hurried knock came at the door.

"Well!" he rather fancied himself in the voice of the soldier-citizen Roche. "What the devil do you want?" he called out politely.

"Is anything wrong, Lieutenant?" a sleepy voice asked.

"Wrong?" Yes, he thought he had that grunt rather pat. "Name of a pig! What should be wrong? Come in!" he thundered.

The soldier was blinking with sleep when he obeyed; he was even a little unsteady on his legs—he was so drowsy. "I—I thought I heard something," he said thickly. "Sounded like a cry—and something heavy falling."

"That was downstairs," the man in the chair said, without looking round. *He* was awake. *He* was watching his prisoner.

"Downstairs?" the man repeated stupidly.

"It must have been the lady," the upright vigilant exclaimed. "You careless hound! Perhaps she's ill. You've been asleep!"

"Shall I go and see?" the other murmured, sleepy but contrite.

"I'll go myself," was the disgusted reply. "You stay here with the prisoner."

"But, Lieutenant——"

"Silence!" the voice of Roche thundered and spluttered. "Obey orders. Pull yourself together," and Brisquet's soldier was pushed roughly down into the chair the other had quitted. "And stay there and never take your eyes off the prisoner until I come back."

And he swaggered out, clanking his saber.

CHAPTER XLII

THE BELLS OF SAINTE ROSEMOND

MY word, it was cold! Colder than cold in Paris that fifteenth day of May. The rich and the fashionable in their fur-lined pelisses and surcoats, paid for and unpaid, shivered and shook; and "Mon Dieu, comme il fait froid" froze in the air, and icicled on red lips; and the poor and the thriftily furless hurried about their business as fast as they could on cold-stiffened feet—to keep warm—if they could—and to get back to their brazier of charcoal, their basins of scalding hot soup.

It was cold at dawn. The Seine crackled icily up at the cold pink of the frowning sky. And when the sun really came, it came veiled and shrouded in clouds, and in the relentless light of high noon the beautiful city (with her alleys of horror and her purlieus of squalor) grew colder and

colder. And at three the gamins had ceased to play in the streets and the foul courts, too chilled to gambol or steal, and with teeth too chattering for oaths to be effectively uttered; and were burrowing into caches of straw, horse-dung-warmed, or crouching on the steam-breathing gratings of the maddeningly fragrant cook-shops.

And by night the cold had grown hideous. Patients in the hospitals, tossing in fever, begged for blankets and comforts—more fire, hot drink. Cold? Ah, mon Dieu!

Just at eleven in the morning (this day of all days cannot be gulped—it's far too important) several separate things happened—each a link in our story, the de Trevièresian epic of bluff.

Just as the bells of Sainte Rosemond struck the hour Joseph Fouché mounted the stairs of Mademoiselle Lenormand, the famous fortune-teller of the Rue de Tournon. Just as the bells of Sainte Rosemond struck the hour Eugène Lavernais, with something like tears in his eyes, and a hank of red silk stretched out on his hands, knelt on one knee at the feet of the Citizeness Joséphine—telling his story, or some of it rather.

Just as the bells of Sainte Rosemond rang the hour Raoul de Morlève struck a bargain for a farmer's cart—struck and clinched it—horse's gear, turnips and all, old blue smock—une blouse d'ouvrier—sabots, tattered hat, long whip and all.

Just as the bells of Sainte Rosemond struck the hour three Royalist jesters—but brave ones, daunt-

less and splendidly selfless, King's men every hair of them—were finishing an excellent breakfast in a sumptuous *salon* in the Faubourg St. Honoré—what had been the clothes of a warrior named Roche thrown over one chair, and what might have been Brisquet himself—if they'd had a man in them—tossed over another.

Just as the bells of Sainte Rosemond struck the hour a circus grew up like a mushroom in an inconspicuous stableyard of a humble cabriolet owner and driver. Three carriages, they'd have put that gay coat of Joseph's to dull shame, looked a bit drab themselves beside the crimson flare of the "King of the Forest's" van-on-wheels—empty as yet, but Citizen Majolin—once in less stirring days Monsieur le Marquis de Clamorgan—and now newly Citizen Montrevel, proprietor of Earth's Greatest Show—for Vermont had not yet given the world her Colossus, the king of all showmen, the prince of all bluffers—who'd have beaten Armand at their game—stood, whip in hand, watching the tawny forest-born being transferred from the cage in which he'd been carted to Paris in the dark to his vivid new quarters. And Valentine—his daughter "Mademoiselle Leontine, the Queen of the Ring"—hung out of a discreetly upper window watching too. Even "Montrevel" kept at some haughty aloofness from the glowering cat.

As the bells of Sainte Rosemond struck the hour the Abbé Brochard trudged up the path that curled from the gate of the little villa to the oleanders at

the garden's far end. His old face was drawn and ashen, but not with the cold, and sheltered in his arms was a sheaf of sweet roses. To-morrow he was going to England. This was his passing from France. He had left the convent at dawn, and had come to keep a last tryst at the grave of a nun. Ha! An old love affair! Yes—you've guessed it—how clever of you! almost as old as Brochard himself, for he'd scarcely been three when their mother, whom he adored, had laid in his arms a wee baby sister. And until the hour of her burial here, secret, at night, he had cherished and loved her, the one love of his life, as he of hers, after the death of their mother. "Christ's love rebukes no home love, breaks no tie of kin apart," and the nun and the priest had served Jesu and Mary none the less holily because their own hearts had clung welded together. As Brochard knelt at her grave, telling his beads over his roses, incensed by the roses, he wished that it had not been decreed that he, too, must go to England, wished that he might stay even here—in France with his dead. He did not once glance at the villa itself. It was locked up—empty of all the humanity that had so seethed, fretted and tricked turbulently through it, a scant few hours ago. He knelt on, his face towards the cold, climbing sun, praying to be forgiven for sins he had never committed, praying for France, praying for Louis, praying for the soul of his sister, his little bébé sister.

Just as the bells of Sainte Rosemond rang out

the hour, Lucette, bending over her fire, stirring broth in a pot, rose up with a jerk—and her old knees creaked with the cold, though the room was beautifully cosy—and Saint Urlose on guard in his niche. A sound had startled her old ears—they had heard it before, more than once, that rattle, and she crossed herself hurriedly before the little shrine where the oil burned in the tiny red lamp, the mignonette grew, and the purple velvet fleur-de-lys bloomed at the bare feet of Mary, before she turned to the big bed where Laurette de Chateaubriant stood weeping. For on the bed of Bretonne Lucette old Bastien lay dying.

Long before Joséphine made Mademoiselle Lenormand a fashionable craze—her fees doubled every few months, two hall carpets (good ones) worn out in a year, all French women and nearly all French men were devoted to fortune-telling. French skepticism is only skin deep. Scratch a French agnostic, and you'll find a *dévot,* every time—devoted to the Church of his childhood, or perchance to some newer, more sensational expression of faith—*dévot* frankly or secretly. Where fortune-telling has not flourished it would be difficult—very—to say. It's a weed that grows rank in every soil or in none. Its roots are struck deep and firm in the human heart, and it bears now and then such astonishing fruit, such huge sweet melons of proof, that neither law, Church, nor philosophy can boast much success or even headway against it. In France it

has scarcely ever needed to be unobtrusive, and certainly not in the tricolor's first flush.

Buy a stuffed lizard, a crystal ball, a toad with blinking mystic eyes, a black cat and a skull, and to-day, as then, if you've an ounce of dash and a good deal of tact, you can make a quick fortune in Paris—and incidentally learn a good deal of your fellow-men, call yourself a cartomancer, an astrologer, a chiromancer, or a daughter of Zazakoo, the Queen of Timbuctoo—or any other sounding thing you will, assume a severe air or a light one, hold yourself aloof proudly, or "my dear" your clients fondly—it's all one and it will pay either way—and pay as nothing else on earth pays. And why not? It's the same old appeal: the great appeal—the same appeal that Rome peals round the world, with prayer, incense, and ritual's grave beautiful authority, and for centuries has—the same appeal that the Salvation Army is strumming and tooting to-day—in Pekin and Brixton, in the madhouse called Russia, in the slums of Oporto, in the streets of Cashmere.

Fouché was a constant patron of the fortune-tellers, and for more than one reason. Many of them were direct agents of his detective bureau—and that their facility for it was enormous needs no laboring. (Incidentally not a few of them were devoted to the Bourbon—and an incalculable aid to his cause.) Also Fouché himself was psychic enough to know that not all the sibyls told and predicted was fraud—but far from it. The psychic

is the psychic's best customer often. And sometimes the psychic is the pseudo-psychic's easiest dupe.

Lenormand held the skull in her big, handsome white hands and peered into the empty eye-sockets, and the Prefect of Police waited her announcement hopefully, for Peluche, the clairvoyante's very black cat, had perched itself on his knee.

And Lenormand justified his rosy anticipations. She predicted him a dukedom, a great ambassadorial trust, vast wealth, power increasing, enormous; she advised him to wink at Royalist escapes, whenever he safely could, rather than excite the volatile sympathies of the changeful populace by too much blood-letting, too much imprisoning, in Paris, sated of both. She fed him with flattery.

"Monsieur le Préfet, you need not my poor aid. You are your own best prophet. Your own second sight is enormous—your instinct superb, infallible." She made no mention of nemesis—of death in exile and disgrace. And she pumped him as only a psychic can pump, and he yielded himself to the inverting process as only a very much flattered man ever unconsciously does. She refused his fee—because it gave her such "strength" to sit for an hour now and then with his Excellency—the "influences" of power, astuteness and wealth that he brought were so enormous, such a help to her in her work. And he kissed her hand when he went.

Then—kicking from a chair the cushion he'd sat on—she called "Marie, come!"—and a girl who had danced in the Tivoli gardens the day before,

and traded cherries for snails, came in through the black velvet curtains—quietly dressed now—and waited for orders.

"Put one egg, a foulard, seven truffles, the tiny red basin full of cream, and a handful of prunes in the little pink basket. Wrap the egg and the prunes in the foulard. Pin the blue jay in your bonnet. Wear the brown shawl. Wear one glove—a torn one. Go to the Rue de Grâce, number seventeen. Say to the concierge, 'My grandmother left me three spoons and an old goat in her will.' At the door to which he will direct you, knock four times quickly—twice loud, then quietly twice. When the door is opened sit down in the nearest chair and hand without a word the basket to the woman who gave you the parsley. She will send you on to the Faubourg St. Honoré with a message. You will see Monsieur de Vivonne there—and probably some of our others. Say to him, besides what you say from the old body at number seventeen, 'When the wind blows butterflies are scarce in November.' Take your orders from Monsieur de Vivonne, unless the Chevalier himself is there. If there are no orders, return back to me."

. . . . .

Joséphine laughed. "Miscreant!" she said, putting her hand on Eugène Lavernais's shoulder. "Fouché will not report it, I think. But if he does, the First Consul shall condone it. I promise you that. Napoleon will refuse me nothing!" A big boast, but not ill-founded—then. "Ah," she said

tenderly, taking the red silk away, and tossing it and her own tapestry-frame aside carelessly, the lovely Creole was never industrious long—"did you not save my own Eugène's life when he so nearly drowned at school—with the cramp? And shall we forget it, Bonaparte and I? Have no fear. You loved the girl. That shall suffice. Now run away. I must dress for déjeuner. Oh! how my poor powder stays not well on to-day." And when he had kissed her hand she let him go—with a motherly touch on his face, and she had asked not a question, neither the girl's name (if he knew it), the address of the shop, nor that of the Villa. And as a rule Napoleon's first wife was as full of feminine curiosity as monkeys are.

. . . . .

"What a ragoût, what a breakfast!" de Morsanne said, rising regretfully from the table. "We shall not have its like in England!"

"We shall not indeed," Armand de Trevières concurred. And de Vivonne sighed bitterly. That nobleman was wearing his full-skirted, cut-away coat wrong side out for luck to-day, and a baby's rattle and a tiny pink cornelian toad that for the same serious purpose hung from the moiré ribbon on which de Morsanne's flower-enameled watch was slung round his neck.

Armand de Trevières was wearing a bouquet of fresh mignonette in his coat—but that was for more than for luck—that was for love.

"Our last day in Paris!" he said—"for the pres-

ent at least. Let us live it! Let us live it as Frenchmen—and gayly."

"Bravo!" cried de Morsanne.

"Vive la bagatelle!" de Vivonne laughed.

"Shall we come back? Will our cause triumph?" de Morsanne asked, suddenly serious.

"Some day," the Comte de Trevières answered gravely. "When red Republicanism has run its sour course, and the Bonaparte canker has eaten itself and its infatuated dupes up—then Louis will return, and we his servants—please God—with him." He lifted a flagon and filled three cups to the brim. No need to name them the toast. Each heart there knew it. Gravely they stood. Gravely they lifted their glasses—high as to heaven. Gravely they drank every red sip, flung down the delicate goblets crash to the marble floor, saying in unison, gravely, before they drank their Royalist sacrament, "To Hell with the Republic! Long live the King."

CHAPTER XLIII

THE TOLLING OF THE BELLS

HOW came Bastien to be dying in the bed of Lucette, Mademoiselle de Chateaubriant watching beside him? Lucette had never heard his name or they hers. How had it come? Very simply, as all the most wonderful things do. Fate—

the greatest of all the magicians—works her miracles so: very simply. Raphael needed but one crayon—lacking even that a finger dipped in color, the wing of a bird, the twig of a bush, would have served. It's your incompetent, ungifted amateur bungler that must squander a fortune in paints and in brushes.

Frail for years now, as they threaded the chill streets of Paris in the bleak hours of early morning, Bastien had called out suddenly in torment, had staggered, and but for the quick arm of Lavernais must have fallen. They were still some distance from Madame de Breau's—no vehicle in sight. They had dismissed their own cabriolet on the outskirts—it had seemed wiser to do so; Bastien himself had urged it.

"Where are we?" Laurette had said anxiously.

"This is the Rue de Grâce," Lavernais had answered.

"Our Lady be praised!" the girl said fervently. "Take us to number seventeen, I beg of you, Monsieur. Quick! Oh, be quick!"

And Lavernais had obeyed without question, almost without thought. And when at her command he had left them, not to return, Laurette knew that not while he lived would the address at which he had parted from her pass his lips—knew that neither Bonaparte nor torture could glean it. She asked no promise. Eugène Lavernais offered none. But each knew that each knew.

Lucette chanced to be leaving the street door as

they reached it. And when Laurette had said—Lavernais hanging back not to hear what she said—"Can you direct me to the lodging of Citizen Poiret?" Lucette, after one shrewd glance, had curtseyed—imprudently, as to Royalty—and led the way back into the house, up the stairs—silently, without a word.

And when he had helped them to lay the old man, very ill now, on the bed, Lavernais had gone, after just one handclasp, passing forever from Laurette's life: she to pass from his never.

When the door had closed Lucette had gone to the demoiselle, and had said wistfully, with a reverence—it is wonderful what old legs can do—under sufficient devotion to caste:

"You are Mademoiselle de Chateaubriant, is it not so?"

"Yes," Laurette replied.

Lucette almost knelt—she bowed so low—but not quite, she knelt but to God, the Saints, and her own seigneur—and rising, said proudly, her old eyes dancing with joy, and with love," I am Lucette Arnot of Quimperlé, the servant of my master, Monsieur le Comte de Trevières, and of Madame la Comtesse his lady, of Mademoiselle his fiancée. He has told me of you, Mademoiselle. He trusts me."

Laurette held out her hand with a beautiful smile. Lucette kissed the soft, girlish hand.

"Merci—ma mère," Laurette said with a blush.

And then old Lucette loved her, and would love

her always; but not quite as she loved le Comte Armand. Oh, dear, no! That was not to be expected.

Bastien was breathing painfully. The cold of the garden, and the frogs, had very nearly killed him—if they had not, as Lucette believed, quite; sapping away his feeble strength, chilling to death the scant life-marrow in the poor old faithful bones.

Lucette went downstairs and sent the concierge for a physician, an émigré whom they dared trust. But before he came, a greater physician was in attendance at the old servant's side.

Lucette put down her saucepan and hurried to the bed, crossing herself as she passed the bisque figure.

Bastien too had heard that rattle before; knew what it meant.

"Adieu, my little lady," he said clearly. "Give my homage to Monsieur le Marquis. I regret not to accompany him to England. I had thought to build a dove-cote there, to show what are our state and our birth. Will you give me a drink?"

Lucette brought him wine in a cup; and Laurette lifted him up. He thanked them both before he let them moisten his lips. The wine gurgled a little as it trickled down the old throat—but he was trying to speak—but "Republic" and "King" were the only words that the two women caught. But still he was thirsty, and Laurette lifted him higher, and this time he drank almost unaided, drank his

last toast, saying clearly, "Here's a health to the House of Clamorgan!"

Those were his last words. But he lay a long time watching Laurette with eyes of dog-like devotion. She slipped to her knees, and he laid a horny old hand on her soft hair, in fealty, in farewell, and too in possession—as a right: he had taught her to walk. Presently with his free hand he began thrashing the air. He was beating frogs to a silence.

The hand on the head of the girl grew heavy and cold on her brow. The other hand ceased its moving. Bastien had gone to a Brighter Exile than he'd have found in frog-ridden London, gone to keep frogs still in some pool in the Hereafter.

When the physician came he sent, as Laurette begged him, for the Abbé Brochard to come from the Bernadine Convent. Brochard was not there, and not to be found, but two other priests came. And presently the girl stole away to her tryst with the uncle at Madame de Breau's, drying her tears as she could—leaving her own beads as well as his own in the faithful dead hands. And before she went she kissed the dear face of the old serving-man.

Lucette had been packing for days now. She was leaving Paris in a few hours—and when she had seen Mademoiselle go, with the sturdy old concierge for escort and guide, she went on with her packing. The last things she moved in the dismantled room were a little bisque figure, a pot of mignonette, and

an absurd artificial flower cut out of purple velvet. But she was taking everything with her, her pots and her pans, her sabots and her best beaded pelisse. She never had worn the pelisse, and never would, it was not suitable raiment for a Breton peasant, she felt, but she had won it at a raffle held for a charitable purpose in the good long ago, she had paid a franc for the ticket, and she would part with the beaded pelisse never.

Laurette had tarried too long in the Rue de Grâce. When she reached Madame de Breau's the house was deserted—they had given her up. Nevertheless, a message had been left for her, but in her haste to find, if she could, her uncle or the Abbé she missed receiving it. She took shelter until long after dark at a clean little pâtisserie the friendly concierge recommended. And when she thought it was time she started, with the baker's wife for company, out across Paris again—to find the North Gate. Armand had said she would see him there. And her father! They were bringing her father to the Toll-house at midnight. She must hurry; for again the old bells of Sainte Rosemond were chiming eleven.

CHAPTER XLIV

SHOW YOUR PASSPORTS

THEY talked of that night's biting cold for years after in Paris. And certainly the coldest corner of the cold-tortured city was the Toll-house at the North Gate.

The office, where travelers had to submit their passports, was a grimy, desolate place; dark, bare, rough plaster walls. A scrawny fire burned in a ramshackle grate. The stools, the benches, the chairs might have been cleaner, but could not have been rougher. The massive oak doors were studded with nails, and had heavy bolts. A barred window looked on to the outer courtyard. A small door let into a cell, and in the door's upper half there was a barred opening through which the interior of the cell could be seen and its occupants watched.

The outer courtyard was in entire darkness, but the road beyond showed clear, as a broad band of white ribbon, under the bright moonlight. A large iron lantern, lit now, hung from the office ceiling, and lighted the room, more or less. Behind the rough, plain table, a third door led to an inner room. On one wall a huge placard told the most strenuous of the many rules that travelers must fulfill and obey.

A sergeant of gendarmes, rather drunk, sat at the table examining passports, and browbeating the

half-frozen travelers who proffered them anxiously.

"Are we all here?" a woman at the fire asked her companion.

"No," he said, "the Abbé has not come, nor Laurette. I am terribly anxious about her. I can't understand it. I left her disguise and her passport with Madame de Breau when I could wait for her there no longer. She was to have joined me there with Bastien. Something must have happened."

A farmer passed the sergeant's tribunal of one. It cost him a fat fowl.

It cost de Morlève a livre. His passport ("Citizen Bertrand") was in order, but the sergeant said it wasn't, and at a glance from "Montrevel" Bertrand slipped his hand into his blouse and slid out a gold piece.

An old woman named Badaut got through without paying the extortioner, and so did two workmen.

"Citizen Montrevel!" called the sergeant.

De Clamorgan rose and went to the table. His disguise was perfect. He looked to the life the smug traveling showman. And Valentine, in cheap green velvet and a soupçon of rouge, honest, but coarse, looked her part to the miracle too!

" 'Citizen Montrevel, proprietor of circus and wild beast show,' the official was reading the passport aloud, 'known as Montrevel's Marvelous Menagerie, three carriages, two animals' cages, and company of ten artists,' where are the ten artists?"

"We are waiting for them," the Marquis told

him. "This is my daughter, Mademoiselle Leontine, the Queen of the Ring."

"Well, Mademoiselle Queen of the Ring, you can't wait here all night," the sergeant said with a hiccough, "we're expecting an important escort from Rouen. You must wait outside—with your—hic—marvelous menagerie," and he threw back the two passports de Clamorgan had tendered.

"It is very cold," Montrevel said, with one hand in a pocket; "can the lady not wait here?"

"No, she can't," snapped the hiccougher. "Didn't I tell you we're expecting an important party——"

Plouarec, the keeper of the Toll-house, rushed in in a panic; a hunchback, dirty, ill-clad.

"S—S—Sergeant!" he wailed—there's no other word for it—"S—Sergeant! Ci—C—Ci—Citizen Ff—Ff—Fouché!"

"Fouché!" The sergeant rose in consternation.

And "Bertrand" shrank on his bench into the shadow, and Montrevel got, with his back to the door, between the dim light and the Queen of the Ring.

And Fouché it was. He came in quickly, and stood glaring about him. He was kissing nobody's hand to-night. "Is Citizen Brisquet not here?" he demanded.

"Not yet, Citizen Prefect," the sergeant replied obsequiously.

"Half-past eleven!" the Prefect read from his watch. "What the devil does Brisquet mean now? And who the mischief are these?"

"A traveling showman and his daughter—on their way to Calais, a farmer waiting for his father, and——"

"Clear the room!" Fouché ordered.

The sergeant turned on Montrevel. "I told you to get out, didn't I?"

"Certainly, certainly," the showman said with great courtesy. "We're just going." And he and the Queen of the Ring slipped promptly by Fouché, too abashed by his great name to flaunt towards him their faces.

"You can wait outside," the sergeant said to them all—a dozen or more were still waiting their turn huddled on the benches—"Hurry now!" And they all went out into the cold and the dark. Some of them sheep-like, some of them grumbling. And Plouarec banged the door after them.

In the outer darkness the three Royalists ventured to gather together.

"Mademoiselle? And the Abbé?" de Morlève asked.

"I am desperately anxious," the Marquis said. "When the time comes—and it almost has come—we can wait for no one."

"Oh! surely they are coming," Madame de Grisolles said.

Laurette was coming. She was nearly there. But the Abbé Brochard would not come. He was staying behind—staying in France. He had fallen asleep, almost twelve hours ago, and lay so still, with his old face pillowed on the grave of a nun.

And there he sleeps still—thanks to Eugène Lavernais and the good-hearted intercession of a Creole woman with a skin like the petals of a camellia flower.

"No sign of the escort yet?" Fouché demanded as the door closed.

"Not yet, Citizen Prefect," the sergeant said as soothingly as he dared.

"Where the devil is Brisquet?" the Prefect fumed. "A nice mess he's made of things! Is everything ready for the arrival of the aristocrat?"

"Everything," the sergeant answered him. "We have some hot soup for the escort and a glass of good wine for the old aristocrat."

"Hu'h! Who ordered that?"

"Citizen Brisquet." Both the sergeant and Plouarec said it.

Fouché grunted—looked at his watch once more. "Where the devil *is* Brisquet?" he growled. "Ah—ah! So you've come at last?" as the well-known figure, long black cloak, big black hat, sinister face, came in at the door. "Twenty minutes to twelve, eh, Citizen Brisquet? Over half an hour late—to-night, of all nights! The escort expected every moment—a nice mess you've made of things—and I trusted you implicitly. I suppose you'll tell me you were catching *another* Chevalier of the Mask—eh?—sending me ridiculous messages about your wonderful capture at St. Cloud—making a fool of me before Bonaparte!"

"Citizen Prefect, what is the matter?" the new-

comer said. He spoke a little huskily. He had a cold and used a handkerchief—almost it covered his face. No wonder he had a cold!—Who wouldn't such weather? But he did not seem anxious to come to the fire—for he came no nearer Fouché.

"Matter!" Fouché snorted. "Matter! Do you mean to tell me you don't know?"

"Know what?"

"Why," Fouché screamed, newly enraged, "that the Chevalier escaped from St. Cloud again last night."

Brisquet collapsed onto the stool on the far, dim side of the table. "Sacré Dieu!" he moaned.

"Precisely," the Prefect said furiously. "So that news astonishes you, does it? Bonaparte is furious and is venting his rage on me. But if I suffer, you shall suffer too—understand that—if I fall, you fall with me."

"But the Chevalier?" a thick voice faltered from under the shame-bowed head.

"Is roaming at large!" Fouché thundered, "and all your fine plans to have him laid by the heels before the fifteenth have come to nothing. Nothing!—ten thousand times worse than nothing! Here we are on the night of the fifteenth—the Duc de Chateaubriant about to enter the gates of Paris—the Chevalier sworn to rescue him—and what do I find? You cooling your heels, hell knows where. Nothing here but incompetence, neglect and delay; instead of a proper guard in charge of the Toll-

house, a drunken sergeant; drunk, sir, drunk, the place full of travelers, and not a sign of the man in whose hands all these important arrangements had been placed—but take care, Monsieur Brisquet —if anything goes wrong to-night—on your head be it. You shall pay dearly, if there's any bungling. You will answer for the security of the prisoner with your own head—you understand—with your own head! Hell and perdition——" but his words failed him, spluttered and died, and Fouché strode out, angrier even than when he had come.

And Brisquet chuckled, went to the chimney and winked at the fire.

The bibulous sergeant whistled indignantly, and shook his fist at the door. "Phew," he hiccoughed, "there's a holy terror for you!"

But a carriage was coming now—and the shod hoofs of the horses, the cracking of whips—and a sharp voice called imperatively, "Gates! Gates! Hello there—gates!"

"The escort! They're early," the sergeant exclaimed. And as Plouarec opened the door to look out a Captain of Gendarmes clanked in.

"Citizen Brisquet?" he demanded.

"Well, Captain?" came the quick reply, "is your prisoner safe?"

"Quite," said the captain. "Shall I bring him in?"

"At once!"

"We've made good time," the captain added.

"And I should like to give the prisoner as long a rest as possible."

"We've some wine and food for him, Captain," the sergeant volunteered. "And some for your men."

"Good," the officer replied as he went out, and in a moment they heard him calling, "Bring the prisoner in!"

Brisquet turned to the sergeant. "Give me the keys—all of them," he said, and added as he took them, "We will have no mistakes to-night."

Plouarec opened the big door wider, and they could see, as all the excited huddle of travelers in the courtyard could even more clearly, for torches and lanterns had sprung up there, the escort lining up to bring the Duc in.

Two dragoons came into the office and stood on each side of the door. And in a moment the prisoner came, leaning on the captain's strong arm, a handsome old man, dignified in his miserable captivity and his peril—waiting proudly for death, but frail, very frail, bent with suffering and illness, weakened by imprisonment. He walked with some difficulty. Seeing Brisquet standing waiting for him, he stopped and bowed to him with an old-time air.

And Brisquet responded—more than might perhaps have been hoped. He bowed too—and less awkwardly than Brisquet had ever before! "You will rest here, Citizen," he said, not rudely, "and take, I hope, some refreshments. There are wine and soup in—in your room."

"I thank you, sir," the Duc answered. "I am very weak—if I might sit a moment by the fire?"

"You cannot do that," was the reply. "I regret that I may not permit it. But you must be lodged in there"—he pointed—"and—and the door locked." And as he opened the cell door, he seemed almost to do it reluctantly, seemed almost ashamed. How reputation wrongs us sometimes! Brisquet was labeled the most kindless, shameless, relentless man in France, more adamant than Napoleon, more vindictive than Fouché.

"A very needless precaution," the Duc said wearily, "with such a frail old man, but I have suffered so many indignities, nothing will move me to protest." And the old aristocrat, leaning on the captain's arm, passed into his cell.

Plouarec bustled in. "Everything is r—r—ready, Ci—Ci—Citizen," he said. And at a nod from Brisquet the sergeant went to the courtyard door, and called, "This way, boys!"

"So—so—so—something to warm you after your l—long, co—co—cold r—r—ride," Plouarec said, as the dragoons, nothing loath, clattered in, and, no more loath, clattered out again into the inner room to which the stammerer pointed—the room where the something to warm (and to cheer) them was laid. But the two on duty still remained so, one on each side of the outer door. The sergeant slipped out through it into the courtyard—perhaps in search of something to warm him also—closing it behind him, and as the captain returned from the cell, Bris-

quet locked its door securely, and pocketed the key.

"He's very weak," the captain said with a nod towards the cell, as he went to the fire. "Poor devil —I doubt if he'll last out his trial."

Brisquet replied with a grunt, and in a moment the officer passed back into the courtyard. He always saw with his own soldier eyes that the horses were cared for properly. But in a moment or two he returned and passed in to his men.

The tall man left alone in the office—except for the immovable silents keeping the door—looked at his watch.

"A quarter to twelve," he said. And as he spoke his face softened—and so had his voice.

And almost as he spoke the intemperate sergeant came intemperately in. He was laughing. "There's a girl outside," he said, sniggering, "wants to see the old boy—the prisoner—if you please. She's a white-faced chit of a thing—says *she's* his daughter."

Yes—decidedly Brisquet's grim face had softened —strangely.

"Show her in," he said curtly.

"What?" mumbled the sergeant. Were his ears fuddled too? He rubbed them.

"Show her in!"

And astonished—almost into sobriety—the sergeant slouched out, to return in a moment with Laurette at his side.

After one quick, sharp glance at the girl Brisquet turned carelessly half away from her—perhaps he

felt some new shame in her presence, because of the boorish part he had played at St. Cloud, though that wasn't like Brisquet—perhaps the sheer loveliness of her dazzled his eyes—and he was afraid to let them linger on it too long, lest it undermine his will for what he still had to do, for, after all, he was a man—in a way—the Herr Brisquet. And certainly in all her pretty life Laurette had never looked prettier. She was hatted and cloaked, of course, in a big scuttle-like beaver shading her excited blue eyes, and her tiny hands lost in a very big muff. She came in with an air, strung up to play her part; but brave as she was, with the girlish intrepidity of love and determination, she shrank back a step at the hated, and unexpected, sight of the terrible Brisquet.

"So, Citizeness," the man said—but, having seen who it was, why did she start at his voice?—"you are determined to mix yourself up in these Royalist plots!"

"I am the daughter of the Duc de Chateaubriant," was the reply. "May I—may I see my father?"

"It is impossible," he said, throwing the word, as it seemed, towards the guards at the door, rather than at her.

"Citizen, I beg of you——" she began, when—

"Laurette, my child, Laurette!" a voice called from the cell—an old face was pressed at its grating.

"My father!" she sobbed rushing to the barrier

between them, and pressing her face to the grating —her fingers through its open spaces.

Brisquet looked away—and so did the guards. And the Toll-house office was silent, except for the tick of the clock, the stir in the courtyard beyond, the hilarity of the dragoons in the inner room, laughing and drinking, and except for a girl's sobbing.

"Oh, sir," she pleaded again, "what harm could I do? I, a weak girl?"

The Citizen shrugged his shoulders. True enough! What harm could she do? "You can wait outside," he told the dragoons at the door. And they passed into the courtyard, surprised but lethargic. "Only a few moments then," the Citizen grumbled, "make the most of them." And he unlocked the cell door.

The old Duc came out very feebly, but Laurette's strong young arms went about him immediately. Brisquet almost turned his back on them, as she led her father to the chair at the fire, and, when she had seated him, knelt down beside him.

"My little Laurette," the old Duc sobbed, as he fumbled her face and her hair—the little curls tumbling out from her beaver. (And Brisquet was handkerchiefing his cold.) "Oh! how the good God is merciful to me, to give us this moment together, no matter how brief! Monsieur," turning his pathetic, worn face to the man in the dark corner, "Heaven will reward you for this."

"Fouché won't," the man retorted dryly, "if he

should hear of it. Remember, Citizeness," he added significantly, as he too passed into the court-yard, "you have only till midnight!"

And Laurette was alone with her father.

CHAPTER XLV

THE LAST TRICK OF ALL

THE Duc could not speak, and Laurette scarcely could. But she mastered herself, for his sake, because the scant time so pressed, and said quickly, "Listen, my dear father. I must waste not one moment. Plans are made for your rescue. Your friends are all here. And the Chevalier has sworn to rescue you to-night."

"Is the Chevalier here?" De Chateaubriant asked feebly.

"I do not know. But I received instructions from him to come here, precisely at a quarter to twelve; to beg leave to see you; and to tell you that all our party are here disguised as travelers, and that at midnight your rescue will be effected."

"But how?" the old man asked. Not unglad—but almost too ill and weary to be greatly interested.

"I do not know—but you may be sure that the Chevalier will succeed. The signal, for the rescue, is to be the striking of midnight on the Toll-house clock."

"It is strange that he left us alone—that man," the Duc said. "I wonder if——"

"Hush!" Laurette whispered.

Yes. It was the hour. The great clock in the tower was striking the hour. "One!" "Two!" "Three!" it boomed out, and Laurette's heart clanged with it, then sickened and stopped. "Four!" "Five!"—she staggered up to her feet—oh! how her legs shook!—and went to the window, "Six!"

"I can see nothing," she said—"Seven!"—"There are men there, but——"—"Eight!"—"I cannot see what they are doing. Oh, what if he failed!"

"Nine!" called the clock.

There was hubbub and rush in the courtyard.

"Ten!"

The door from the courtyard burst open. Two dragoons came hurriedly in, and behind them six or seven others, a farmer boy in a smock, Montrevel and his daughter, and, slinking back in the shadow, Brisquet himself.

"Eleven!"

One dragoon closed the door closely again. A great peal of laughter came from the inner room, and at the sound—as if at a cue—as if he'd rehearsed it—the second dragoon, waiting at that second door, quietly turned the key in it, put the key in his pocket, and silently, carefully, pushed the bolts of the door top and bottom. He looked at Brisquet. Brisquet nodded and smiled, and at that

smile—on a face she thought smileless—Laurette, still on watch at the window, gave a little cry and took a step towards him.

Brisquet faced her squarely then—looked straight in her eyes, and put a quick finger to his lip—and with a smothered little gurgle of odd laughter, the girl cowered back in the window.

"Twelve!"

The dragoon who had bolted the door was crossing the room. He went up to the Duc de Chateaubriant, took the old noble's thin hand, and bent over the frail fingers, as he might have bent over Louis's, and said, with some emotion:

"Monsieur le Duc, permit me to introduce myself—I am the Vicomte de Morsanne. You are saved. Your escort is locked and bolted into that room; and we have secured Brisquet."

At that Laurette, looking again, saw that Brisquet was bound—his arms tied to his side. And yet she could swear he'd lifted a finger to his lips but now, grinned at de Morsanne—if this indeed was Morsanne—yes, and winked at him too!

The old Duc could not speak. He tried to rise, but he fell back in his chair, as a man dressed as a cheap sort of showman moved to him from the group at the back, holding out a hand that shook, saying, "My brother!"

De Morsanne gave Nature a moment or two—and ill Old Age. Then he exclaimed, "We must go!"

But de Clamorgan delayed them an instant to

exclaim as he caught sight of her, "Laurette! How did you get here?"

"The Chevalier sent me instructions," she told him.

"The Chevalier!" her uncle said, puzzled.

"Armand left me a letter at St. Cloud last night," Laurette explained proudly.

"Armand!" the Marquis said coldly—frowning—"What has Monsieur de Trevières to do with this?"

"He told me to join you here to-night." The young voice was haughty now.

"Oh, heavens! What folly!" scolded the Marquis. "Is that wretched bungler always to meddle in our affairs?"

Laurette went to him at that. "Uncle!" she said, "you are making a terrible mistake. Don't you see?"

"See? What?"

"Don't you understand?"—with a proud little laugh—"Armand de Trevières is the *real* Chevalier. Armand is the Purple Mask!"

"That bungler!" the Marquis stuttered, dumfounded. "Impossible."

"On the contrary," Brisquet broke in, coming out from the shadow, coming close to Laurette. "Mademoiselle," he said, breaking off his bonds with odd ease, "is quite right."

He shook his hat off with a toss of his head, and a laugh, and a big wig fell with the hat. "I told

you I should bob up again, didn't I?" said Armand de Trevières.

De Clamorgan was speechless.

Madame de Grisolles and de Morlève drew nearer: she too was amazed; de Morlève was not.

"It is you," Armand went rapidly on, "who have bungled, Monsieur le Marquis. You doubted me. You took upon yourself to re-arrange my plans. You thought you could do my business better than I could myself. So, you sent to our agent in England for a substitute, who was to be sacrificed ruthlessly, mercilessly, needlessly. Cadonal informed me of your plan. I did not approve of it. I preferred to do my own dying, if dying it came to. So I came over as substitute for myself; to carry out my own plans, in my own way! But—come," he concluded "Now quickly to the carriages and the horses. We have delayed too long—and every moment is precious."

They started then to take the Duc out, quietly and carefully, de Morsanne going ahead to clear the courtyard. The Marquis and de Vivonne leading the ill man very gently, one at each arm. And Laurette left his side for a moment and went to Armand.

"But what about Brisquet?" she asked.

De Trevières smiled gayly. "I fooled Brisquet," he told her, "with an urgent summons to appear before Bonaparte, to explain my escape from St. Cloud. But he may be on our track again any moment now. We have delayed too long."

And they had.

"Sentry! Sentry!" It was the Captain of the Dragoons calling from the inner room. He was trying the door. "What's the matter, sentry?"

De Morsanne, reëntering, went to the side door, and de Trevières after one swift look about the bare office, swooped on the placard of rules, wrenched it down, threw it on the table—blank side up—and began writing on it rapidly; writing and sketching. Laurette, anxious but admiring, at his elbow. And the others hastened the Duc into his carriage.

"It's all right, Captain," de Morsanne called through the door. "It's only the menagerie passing through the gates. There's a circus here, you know."

"What's the matter with the door?" the captain's voice insisted. "It's locked!"

"Locked? Of course not! It must have stuck" —and the Baron de Morsanne pretended to pull and tug at the recalcitrant door.

At that inconvenient instant hoofs rang in the distance.

"A horseman! Brisquet!" de Vivonne said breathlessly, dashing in from the courtyard.

"Oh, heavens!" Laurette cried, catching at Armand.

He smiled down at her cheerfully. "Wait!" he said. "Let me think! Ah, I have it! Give me your pistol, de Morsanne, and yours, de Vivonne, quick!" He whispered something rapidly to de Morsanne. "You understand?" he added aloud.

"Yes," de Morsanne nodded.

"Laurette, up here!" Armand cried, and swung her on to a bench by the window—ran to the center door and hung the placard behind it. "Now," he said to de Morsanne.

And at that signal de Morsanne began knocking violently on the door he himself had locked, and called out with the greatest excitement, "Captain! Captain! We've been fooled. It's the Purple Mask! He's here disguised as Brisquet!"

"What?" came through the door a horrified voice.

With a supreme effort de Morsanne, the dragoon, jerked at the door. Silently he pulled back the bolts. "Quick!" he cried, "quick! He's here now!"

The horses' hoofs stopped outside, just as the carriage into which they had lifted the Duc drove quietly off. And as Brisquet burst open the courtyard door—it stuck a bit too—and dashed lumbering in, Armand de Trevières slipped quietly out, with Laurette by the hand. And, at a glance from Armand de Vivonne followed them.

"Ah!" Brisquet panted—the new Brisquet—the real Brisquet, "ah! Gendarme! Your prisoner, is he safe?"

"Quite safe," de Morsanne answered him, letting the key turn in the inner room's door.

Followed by Plouarec, the sergeant not sober, and a pell-mell rabble of his own soldiers, an outraged Captain of Dragoons burst furiously into the office.

"Hell and perdition!" he cried. "So that was your game! So, so! Monsieur le Chevalier of the Mask, we have got you this time!" and he pointed his pistol full in the face of an outraged Brisquet—the real Brisquet. And every soldier of the escort held his gun ready to fire at Brisquet—the genuine Brisquet.

"What the hell——" Brisquet began.

"Oh, you can't fool us," sneered the captain, elated and truculent. "Do you think we don't know you, my dear Purple Mask? Why, a blind man could see through your disguise!"

"Throw down your guns, or I fire!" cried a new voice.

Armand de Trevières had slipped back—without Laurette—into the room. He stood between Brisquet and the captain, a pistol in either hand, a pistol well aimed at each.

And at that Brisquet gave it up!

"*This* is the Purple Mask," he groaned to the captain.

Then consternation was indescribable, furious and Gallic.

"Order your gendarmes to throw down their arms, or I blow you to eternity," Armand said quietly. "Quick, or I fire!"

"Throw them down! Throw them down!" Brisquet said with a gulp.

With a shrug the captain obeyed. Brisquet was his superior. And after their officer's weapon, all

the guns of the escort clattered down to the floor with a crash.

"Tit for tat, Monsieur Brisquet!" cried Armand the Mask. "You trapped me at St. Cloud; I take this trick!" He backed slowly to the wide door, covering Brisquet and the captain with his two pistols as he went. "Good-by, Monsieur Brisquet! Adieu! Pleasant dreams!"

And the roysterer was gone!

De Morsanne followed him rapidly, banged the door, and locked it—from the outside.

And the Purple Mask had won the last trick of all.

CHAPTER XLVI

AU REVOIR, FRANCE!

SO swiftly they rode, and so swiftly they drove, so skillfully they twisted and turned, that they never were caught.

Twenty confederates sprang to their aid whenever they paused.

Fifty obstacles tripped and fettered Brisquet and his fellow-pursuers—when at long last they were able to begin a pursuit. But so long were they delayed, locked in, and delayed from beginning their quest of reprisal, when amid indescribable confusion they had been disimprisoned, that the fugitives were

halfway to the coast and their boat, before even one dragoon had his foot in the stirrup.

The fugitives won.

They drove the Duc carefully, but they drove the Duc swiftly.

Just at dawn they slipped one by one on to the staunch waiting vessel.

And Lucette, rising up from a mountain of luggage, curtseyed on the deck as de Trevières lifted Laurette up the ladder.

The Bretonne woman had left only one thing in Paris—all else that she valued she'd brought with her. She had left her cherished feather bed—why, is easily imagined. But even so she had sold it to her friend the concierge—to be taken when convenient. For Lucette was thrifty. And already, as she had sat waiting for her seigneur—and his lady—she had planned to start a snail-farm in England. Escargots would thrive there surely with plenty of lettuce to feed on, and Lucette to feed them.

In the comfortable cabin the Duc fell asleep in his chair after one mouthful of soup—he was so weary. But, ill as he was, he looked better already.

He fell asleep with his hand on Laurette's hair. But presently it slipped off to his knee. And at a word from de Morlève, "You may trust me to watch with him," she let Armand de Trevières take her hand and lead her back to the deck—to watch by his side France while they could.

The Marquis and Valentine de Grisolles stayed with Raoul de Morlève and the Duc.

On the deck two gay dragoons were chaffing old Lucette.

"Mon Dieu!" de Morsanne greeted the lovers—"but we'll have a breakfast—at least one—on perfidious England. We're taking it with us. What do you think Madame-Mother Lucette's got in that great sack? Aubergines! Guess what's in that cask? Escargots! Dozens and dozens of fat ones! And in the enormous bag? Legs! Legs enough for every frog in England!"

"Listen!" Laurette told them gravely, as church bells chimed out from the shore—church bells in France!

And the waves of the sea caught up the chiming. But the waves said—so the Purple Mask thought,

"To the devil with the Republic!
Long live the King!"

THE END

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